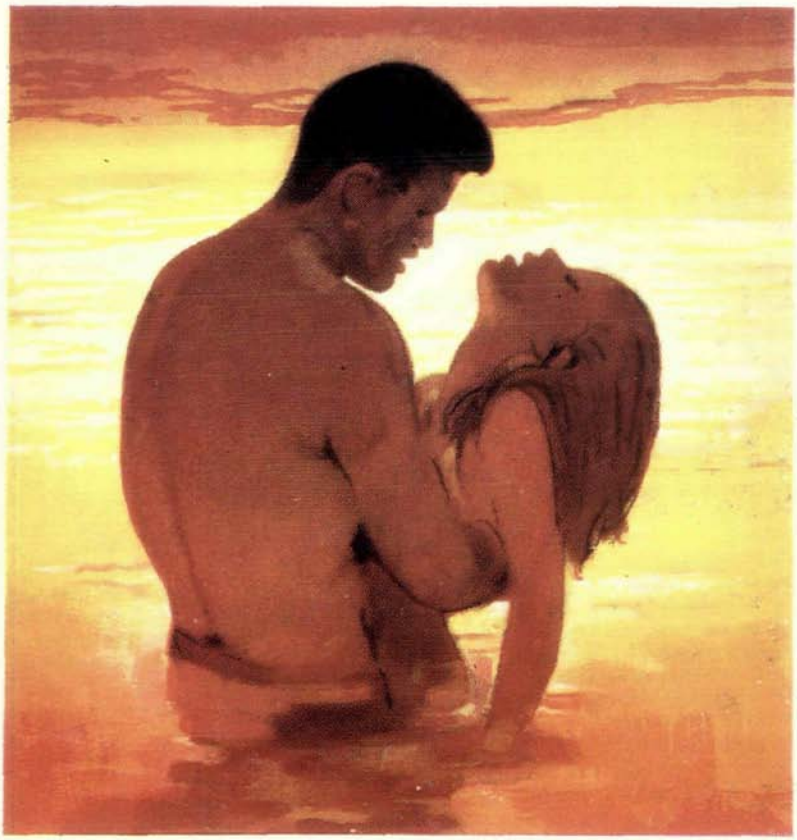
argosy

NEW GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

12 exciting stories

January



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by

Jean Rhys

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Because of its rare and imaginative quality, Argosy presents this extract, the first part of Jean Rhys' compelling new book, which Francis Wyndham, who knows her well, introduces—

For many years, Jean Rhys has been haunted by the figure of the first Mrs. Rochester—the mad wife in Jane Eyre. This extract from the novel she is writing—is her story. Not, of course, literally so: it is in no sense a pastiche on Charlotte Brontë and exists in its own right. But the Brontë book provided the initial inspiration for an imaginative feat almost uncanny in its vivid intensity. From her personal knowledge of the West Indies, Miss Rhys knew about the mad Creole heiresses in the early nineteenth century, who languished uneasily in the oppressive beauty of their tropical surroundings, ripe for exploitation. It is one of these that she has chosen for her latest heroine, Antoinette Cosway.

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

THEY say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, " because she pretty like pretty self," Christophine said.

She was my father's second wife, far too young for him they thought, and, worse still, a Martinique girl. When I asked her why so few people came to see us she told me that the road from Spanish Town to Coulibri Estate where we lived was very bad and that road repairing was now a thing of the past. (My father, visitors, horses, feeling safe in bed—all belonged to the past.)

Another day I heard her talking to Mr. Luttrell, our neighbour, her only friend. " Of course they have their own misfortunes.

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Still waiting for this compensation the English promised when the Emanicipation Act was passed. Some will wait for a long time."

How could she know that Mr. Luttrell would be the first who grew tired of waiting? One calm evening he shot his dog, swam out to sea and was gone for always. No agent came from England to look after his property—Nelson's Rest it was called—and people from Spanish Town rode up to gossip and discuss the tragedy.

An unlucky place they said. Strange things happened there. "Live at Nelson's Rest? Not for love or money."

Mr. Luttrell's house was left empty, shutters banging in the wind—and soon the black people said it was haunted and wouldn't go near it. And no one came near us.

I got used to a solitary life and began to distrust strangers, but my mother still planned and hoped—perhaps she had to hope every time she passed a looking-glass.

She didn't seem to care at all when the negroes jeered at her—this was after her clothes grew shabby. (They notice clothes, they know all about money.)

Then she persuaded a Spanish Town doctor to visit my younger brother Pierre who staggered when he walked and couldn't speak distinctly. I don't know what the doctor told her or what she said to him but he never came again and after that she changed. Suddenly, not gradually. She grew thin and silent, and at last she refused to leave the house at all.

Our garden was large—the largest and most beautiful in the world I thought—it was that garden in the Bible, and the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. Long grass grew between the flagstones, and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. The tree ferns were as tall as forest tree ferns and underneath them the light was green. Some of our orchids withered but others flourished, greedy-looking, snaky-looking or too beautiful, not to be touched. One in particular was exactly like an octopus—its thin long brown tentacles, bare of leaves, hung from a twisted root. Twice a year it flowered—then the scent was sweeter and stronger than anything else in the garden. Not an inch of tentacle showed—it was a bell-shaped mass of white and mauve and deep purple, wonderful to see. But I never wanted to go near it.

My mother usually walked up and down the glacis, a paved roofed-in terrace which ran the length of the house and sloped upwards to a clump of bamboos. Standing by the bamboos

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she had a clear view to the sea, but anyone passing could stare at her. They stared and laughed as loudly as they could. She used not to care when they laughed at her, but now long after the sound was far away and faint she kept her eyes shut and her hands clenched. Stiff all over. A frown came between her black eyebrows, deep—it might have been cut with a knife. I hated this frown and once I touched her forehead trying to smooth it. But she pushed me away, not toughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her. She wanted to sit with Pierre or walk where she pleased without being pestered, she wanted peace and quiet. I was old enough to look after myself. "Oh, let me alone," she would say, "let me alone," and after I knew that she talked aloud to herself I was a little afraid of her.

So I spent most of my time in the kitchen which was in an outbuilding some way off. Christophine slept in the little room next to it.

When evening came she sang to me if she was in the mood. I couldn't always understand her patois songs—she also came from Martinique—but she taught me the one that meant "The little ones grow old, the children leave us, will they come back?" and the one about the cedar tree flowers which only last for a day.

The music was gay but the words were sad and her voice often quavered and broke on the high note at the end. Adieu. Not adeu as we said it, but *à Dieu* which made more sense after all. The loving man was lonely, the girl was deserted, the children never came back. Adieu.

Her songs were not like Jamaican songs, and she was not like the other women.

She was much blacker—blue-black with a thin face and straight features. She wore a black dress, gold earrings and a yellow head handkerchief—carefully tied with the two high points in front. No other negro woman wore black, or tied her handkerchief Martinique fashion. She had a quiet voice and a quiet laugh—when she did laugh—and though she could speak good English if she wanted to, and French as well as patois, she took care to talk as they talked. Yet they would have nothing to do with her. She had only one friend—a woman called Maillotte, and Maillotte was not a Jamaican.

The girls from the bayside who sometimes helped with the washing and cleaning were terrified of her. That, I soon discovered, was why they came at all—for she never paid them. All the women were afraid of her. Even—I was certain—my mother.

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So I asked about Christophine.

"She was your father's wedding present to me—one of his presents. He thought I would be pleased with a Martinique girl. I don't know how old she was when they brought her to Jamaica, quite young. I don't know how old she is now. Does it matter? Why do you pester and bother me about all these things that happened long ago? Christophine stayed with me because she wanted to stay. She had her own very good reasons you may be sure. I dare say we would have died if she'd turned against us and that would have been a better fate. To die and be forgotten and at peace. Not to know that one is abandoned, lied about, helpless. All the ones who died—who says a good word for them now?"

"Godfrey stayed too," I said. "And Sass."

"They stayed," she said angrily, "because they wanted somewhere to sleep and something to eat. That boy Sass! When his mother pranced off and left him here—a great deal she cared—why he was a little skeleton. Now he's growing into a big strong boy and away he goes. We shan't see him again. Godfrey is a rascal. These new ones aren't too kind to old people and he knows it. That's why he stays. Doesn't do a thing but eat enough for a couple of horses. Pretends he's deaf. He isn't deaf—he doesn't want to hear. What an old devil he is!"

"Why don't you tell Godfrey to find somewhere else to live?" I said, and she laughed.

"He wouldn't go. He'd probably try to force us out. I've learnt to let sleeping curs lie," she said.

Would Christophine go if you told her to? I thought. But I didn't say it. I was afraid to say it.

It was too hot that afternoon. I could see the beads of perspiration on her upper lip and the dark circles under her eyes. I started to fan her, but she turned her head away. She might rest if I left her alone, she said.

Once I would have gone back quietly to watch her asleep on the blue sofa—once I made excuses to be near her when she brushed her hair, a soft black cloak to cover me, hide me, keep me safe.

But not any longer. Not any more.

These were all the people in my life—my mother and Pierre, Christophine, Godfrey, and Sass who had left us.

I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us. They called us white cockroaches. Let sleeping dogs lie. One day a

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little girl followed me singing, "Go away white cockroach, go away, go away." I walked fast, but she walked faster. "White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you. Go away."

When I was safely home I sat close to the old wall. Its green moss was soft as velvet and I never wanted to move again. Everything would be worse if I moved. Christophine found me there when it was nearly dark, and I was so stiff she had to help me to get up. She said nothing, but next morning Tia was in the kitchen with her mother Maillotte, Christophine's friend. Soon Tia was my friend and I met her nearly every morning at the turn of the road to the river.

Sometimes we left the bathing-pool at midday, sometimes we stayed till late afternoon. Then Tia would light a fire—fires always lit for her, sharp stones did not hurt her bare feet, I never saw her cry. We boiled green bananas in an old iron pot and ate them with our fingers out of a calabash and after we had eaten she slept at once. I could not sleep, but I wasn't quite awake as I lay in the shade looking at the pool—deep and dark green under the trees, brown-green if it had rained, but a bright sparkling green in the sun. The water was so clear that you could see the pebbles at the bottom of the shallow part. Blue and white and striped red. Very pretty. Late or early we parted at the turn of the road. My mother never asked me where I had been or what I had done, but it was understood that she would not approve of Tia.

Christophine had given me some new pennies which I kept in the pocket of my dress. They dropped out one morning so I put them all on a stone. They shone like gold in the sun. Tia stared. She had small eyes, very black, set deep in her head.

Then she bet me three of the pennies that I couldn't turn a somersault under water, "like you say you can."

"Of course I can."

"I never see you do it," she said. "Only talk."

"Bet you all the money I can," I said.

But after one somersault I still turned and came up choking. Tia laughed loudly and told me that it certainly look like I drown dead that time. Then she picked up the money.

"I did do it," I said when I could speak, but she shook her head. I hadn't done it good and besides pennies didn't buy much. Why did I look at her like that? "Keep them then, you cheating nigger," I said for I was tired, and the water I had swallowed made me feel sick. "I can get more if I want to."

That's not what she hear, she said. She hear all we poor like beggar. We ate salt fish—no money for fresh fish. That

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old house so leaky, you run with calabash to catch water when it rain. Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money. They didn't look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger.

I wrapped myself in my torn towel and sat on a stone with my back to her, shivering cold. But the sun couldn't warm me. I wanted to go home. I looked round and Tia had gone. I searched for a long time before I could believe that she had taken my dress with her—not my underclothes, she never wore any—but my dress, starched, ironed, clean that morning. She had left me hers and I put it on at last and walked home in the blazing sun feeling sick, hating Tia. I planned to get round the back of the house to the kitchen, but passing the stables I stopped to stare at three strange horses and my mother saw me and called. She was on the glacis with two young ladies and a gentleman. Visitors! I dragged up the steps unwillingly—I had longed for visitors once, but that was years ago.

They were very beautiful, I thought, and they wore such beautiful clothes that I looked away down at the flagstones and when they laughed—the gentleman laughed the loudest—I ran into the house, into my bedroom. There I stood with my back against the door and I could feel my heart all through me. I heard them talking and I heard them leave. I came out of my room and my mother was sitting on the blue sofa. She looked at me for some time before she said that I seemed agitated, I behaved so oddly. My dress was even dirtier than usual.

"It's Tia's dress."

"But why are you wearing Tia's dress? Tia? Which one of them is Tia?"

Christophine who had been in the pantry listening came at once and was told to find a clean dress for me. "Throw that thing away. Burn it."

Then they quarrelled.

Christophine said I had no clean dress. "She got two dress, wash and wear. You want clean dress to drop from heaven? Some people crazy in truth."

"She must have another dress," said my mother. "Somewhere." But Christophine told her loudly that it shameful. She run wild, she grow up worthless. And nobody care.

My mother walked over to the window. ("Marooned," said her straight narrow back, her carefully coiled hair. "Marooned.")

"She has an old muslin dress. Find that."

While Christophine scrubbed my face and tied my plaits with

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a fresh piece of string she told me that those were the new people at Nelson's Rest. They called themselves Luttrell, but English or not English they were not like old Mr. Luttrell. Old Mr. Luttrell spit in their face if he see how they look at you. Trouble walk into the house this day. Trouble walk in.

The old muslin dress was found and it tore as I forced it on. She didn't notice.

No more slavery! She had to laugh! "These new ones had Letter of the Law. Same thing. They got magistrate. They got fine. They got prison and chain gang. They got tread machine to wash up people's feet. New ones worse than old ones—more cunning, that's all."

All that evening my mother didn't speak to me or look at me. She was ashamed of me. I was growing up like a white nigger, it was all true. I went to bed early and I slept at once with the sheet over my head. I didn't dream. But I woke up knowing that everything was changed. It would never be the same again—it would go on changing.

I don't know how she got money to buy white muslin and the pink. Yards of muslin. She may have sold her last ring, for there was one left. I saw it in her jewel-box—that, and a locket with a shamrock inside. They were mending and sewing first thing in the morning and still sewing when I went to bed. In a week she had a new dress and so had I.

The Luttrells lent her a horse, and she would ride off very early and not come back till late next day—tired out because she had been to a dance or a moonlight picnic. She was gay and laughing—younger than I had ever seen her and the house was sad when she had gone.

So I too left it and stayed away till dark. I was never long at the bathing-pool, I never met Tia.

I took another road, past the old sugar works and the water wheel that had not turned for years. I went to parts of Coulibri that I had not seen, where there was no road, no path, no track. And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think, It's better than people. Blacks ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin—once I saw a snake—all better than people.

Better. Better, better than people.

All the red and yellow flowers in the sun and I was thinking of nothing and it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer.

I knew the time of day when though it is hot and blue and there are no clouds, the sky can have a very black look.

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I was bridesmaid when my mother married Mr. Mason in Spanish Town. Christophine frizzed my hair. I carried a bouquet and everything I wore was new—even my beautiful slippers. But their eyes slid away from my hating face. I knew what all these smooth smiling people said about her when she was not listening, and they did not guess I was. Hiding from them in the garden when they visited Coulibri I had listened.

"A fantastic marriage and he will regret it. Why should a very wealthy man who could take his pick of all the girls in the West Indies, and many in England too, probably."

"Why probably?" the other voice said. "Certainly."

"Then why should he marry a widow without a penny to her name and Coulibri a wreck of a place? Emancipation killed old Cosway? Nonsense—the estate was going downhill for years before that. He drank himself to death. Many's the time when—well! And all those women! She never did anything to stop him—she encouraged him. Presents for the bastards every Christmas. Old customs? Some old customs are better dead and buried. Her new husband will have to spend a pretty penny before the house is fit to live in—leaks like a sieve. And what about the stables and the coach-house dark as pitch, and the servants' quarters and the six foot snake I saw with my own eyes curled up on the privy seat last time I was here. Alarmed? I screamed. Then that horrible old man she keeps here came hobbling along, doubled up with laughter. As for those two children—the boy an idiot kept out of sight and mind, and the girl going the same way in my opinion—such a lowering expression."

"Oh I agree," the other one said, "but Annette is such a pretty woman. And what a dancer. Reminds me of that song, 'Light as cotton blossom on the something breeze,' or is it air?"

Yes, what a dancer—that night when they came home from their honeymoon in Trinidad and they danced on the glacis to no music. There was no need for music when she danced. They stopped and she leaned backwards over his arm down till her black hair touched the flagstones—still down, down. Then up again in a flash laughing. She made it look so easy—as if anyone could do it, and he kissed her—a long kiss. I was there that time too but they had forgotten me and soon I wasn't thinking of them. I was remembering that woman saying, "Dance! He didn't come to the West Indies to dance—he came to make money as they all do. Some of the big estates are going cheap, and one unfortunate's loss is always a clever man's gain. No, the whole thing is a mystery. It's evidently useful to

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keep a Martinique Obeah woman on the premises." She meant Christophine. She said it mockingly, not meaning it, but soon other people were saying it—and meaning it.

While the repairs were being done and they were in Trinidad, Pierre and I stayed with Aunt Cora in Spanish Town.

Coulibri looked the same when we all got back, clean and tidy, no grass between the flagstones, no leaks. But it didn't feel the same. Sass had come back and I was glad. They can smell money somebody said. Mr. Mason engaged some new servants—I didn't like any of them excepting Mannie the groom. It was whispers about Christophine changed it more than the repairs or the new furniture or the strange faces. The whispers about Christophine changed it.

I knew her room so well—the pictures of the Holy Family and the prayer for a happy death. She had a bright patchwork counterpane, a broken-down press for her clothes and my mother had given her an old rocking-chair.

Yet one day when I was waiting there I was suddenly very much afraid. The door was open to the sunlight, someone was whistling near the stables but I was afraid. I was certain that hidden in the room (behind the old black press?) there was a dead man's dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly. Drop by drop the blood was falling into a red basin, and I imagined I could hear it. No one had ever spoken to me about Obeah—but I knew what I would find if I dared to look. Then Christophine came in smiling and pleased to see me. Nothing alarming ever happened and I forgot, or told myself I had forgotten.

Mr. Mason would laugh if he knew how frightened I had been. He would laugh even louder than he did when my mother told him that she wished to leave Coulibri.

This began when they had been married for over a year. They always said the same things and I seldom listened to the argument now. I knew that we were hated: but to leave Coulibri —for once I agreed with my stepfather. That was not possible.

"You must have some reason," he would say, and she would answer, "I need a change," or "We could visit Richard." Richard, Mr. Mason's son by his first marriage, was at school in Barbados. He was going to England soon and we had seen very little of him.

"An agent could look after this place. For the time being. The people here hate us. They certainly hate me." Straight out she said that one day, and it was then he laughed so heartily.

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"Annette, be reasonable. You were the widow of a slave owner, the daughter of a slave owner, and you had been living here alone, with two children, for nearly five years when we met. Things were at their worst then. But you were never harmed."

"How do you know that I was not harmed?" she said. "We were so poor then," she told him, "we were something to laugh at. They thought that Pierre would die soon and they knew that if he died I would. As for—" she shrugged. "But we are not poor now," she said. "You are not a poor man. Do you suppose that they don't know all about your estate in Trinidad? And the Antigua property? They talk about us without stopping. They invent stories about you, and lies about me. They try to find out what we eat every day."

"They are curious. It's natural enough. You have lived alone far too long, Annette. You imagine enmity which doesn't exist. Always one extreme or the other. Didn't you fly at me like a little wildcat when I said nigger. Not nigger, not even negro. Black people I must say, les noirs. Do you remember?"

"You don't really like, or even recognise, the good in them," she said, "and you won't believe in the other side."

"They're too damn lazy to be dangerous," said Mr. Mason. "I know that."

"They are more alive than you are, lazy or not, that's what you don't like. And they can be dangerous and cruel for reasons you wouldn't understand."

"No, I don't understand," Mr. Mason always said. "I don't understand at all."

But she'd speak about going away again. Persistently. Angrily.

So that evening as I went indoors I was not surprised to hear her excited voice.

"Very well. As you refuse to consider it, *I* will go and take Pierre with me. You won't object to that, I hope?"

"You are perfectly right, Annette," said Aunt Cora and that did surprise me. She seldom spoke when they argued.

Mr. Mason also seemed surprised and not at all pleased.

"You talk so wildly," he said. "And all so mistaken. Of course you can get away for a change if you wish it. I promise,"

"You have promised that before," she said. "You don't keep your promises."

He sighed. "Coulibri suits me. I feel very well here. However, we'll arrange something. Quite soon."

"I will not stay here any longer," my mother said. "It is not safe. It is not safe for Pierre."

Aunt Cora nodded.

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As it was late I ate with them instead of by myself as usual. Myra, one of the new servants, was standing by the sideboard, waiting to change the plates. We ate English food now, beef and mutton, pies and puddings.

I was glad to be like an English girl but there was too much of it, and I missed the pepper Christophine always used.

My stepfather talked about a plan to import labourers—coolies he called them—from the East Indies. When Myra had gone out Aunt Cora said, "I shouldn't discuss that if I were you. Myra is listening."

"But the people here won't work. They don't want to work. Look at this place—it's enough to break your heart."

"Hearts have been broken," she said. "Be sure of that. I suppose you all know what you are doing."

"Do you mean to say—"

"I said nothing, except that it would be wiser not to tell that woman your plans—necessary and merciful no doubt. I don't trust her."

"Lived here most of your life and know nothing about the people. It's astonishing. They are children—they wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Unhappily children do hurt flies," said Aunt Cora.

Myra came in again looking mournful as she always did though she smiled when she talked about hell. Everyone went to hell, she told me, you had to belong to her sect to be saved and even then—just as well not to be too sure. She had thin arms and big hands and feet and the handkerchief she wore round her head was always white. Never striped or a gay colour.

So I looked away from her at my favourite picture, *The Miller's Daughter*, a lovely English girl with brown curls and blue eyes and a dress slipping off her shoulders. Then I looked across the white tablecloth and the vase of yellow roses at Mr. Mason, so sure of himself, so without a doubt English. And then at my mother, so without a doubt not English, but no white nigger either. Not my mother. Never had been. Never could be. Yes, she would have died, I thought, if she had not met him. And for the first time I was grateful and I liked him. There are more ways than one of being happy, better perhaps to be peaceful and contented and protected, as I feel now, peaceful for years and long years, and afterwards I may be saved whatever Myra says. (When I asked Christophine what happened when you died, she said, "You want to know too much.") I remembered to kiss my stepfather goodnight. Once Aunt Cora had told me, "He's very hurt because you never kiss him." "He does not

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look hurt," I argued. "Great mistake to go by looks," she said, "one way or the other."

I went into Pierre's room which was next to mine, the last one in the house. The bamboos were outside his window. You could almost touch them. He still had a crib and he slept more and more, nearly all the time. When he was lifted on to the glacis morning and evening he seemed to wake up a little. He was so thin that I could lift him easily. Mr. Mason had promised to take him to England later on, there he would be cured, made like other people. "And how will you like that," I told him, as I kissed him. "How will you like being made exactly like other people?" He looked happy asleep, so I whispered, "But that will be later on. Later on. Sleep now." It was then I heard the bamboos creak again, a sound like whispering outside. I forced myself to look out of the window. There was a full moon but I saw nobody, nothing but shadows.

I left a light on the chair by my bed and waited for Christophine, for I liked to see her last thing. But she did not come, and as the candle burnt down, the safe peaceful feeling left me. I wished I had a big Cuban dog to lie by my bed to protect me; I wished I had not heard a noise by the bamboo clump, or that I were very young again, for then I believed in my stick. It was not a stick, but a long narrow piece of wood, with two nails sticking out at the end, a shingle, perhaps. I picked it up soon after they killed our horse and I thought I can fight with this, if the worst comes to the worst I can fight to the end though the best ones fall and that is another song. Christophine knocked the nails out, but she let me keep the shingle and I grew very fond of it. I believed that no one could harm me when I had it near me, to lose it would be a great misfortune. All this was long ago, when I was still babyish and sure that everything was alive, not only the river or the rain, but chairs, looking-glasses, cups, saucers, everything.

I woke up and it was still night and my mother was there. She said, "Get up and dress yourself, and come downstairs quickly." She was dressed, but she had not put up her hair and one of her plaits was loose. "Quickly," she said again, then she went into Pierre's room, next door. I heard her speak to Myra and I heard Myra answer her. I lay there, half asleep, looking at the lighted candle on the chest of drawers, till I heard a noise as though a chair had fallen over in the little room, then I got up and dressed.

The house was on different levels. There were three steps

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down from my bedroom and Pierre's to the dining-room and then three steps from the dining-room to the rest of the house, which we called "downstairs." The folding doors of the dining-room were not shut and I could see that the big drawing-room was full of people. Mr. Mason, my mother, Christophine and Mannie and Sass. Aunt Cora was sitting on the blue sofa in the corner now wearing a black silk dress, her ringlets were carefully arranged. She looked very haughty, I thought. But Godfrey was not there, or Myra or the cook, or any of the others.

"There is no reason to be alarmed," my stepfather was saying as I came in. "If you think I am to be intimidated by a handful of drunken negroes, you are very much mistaken." He opened the door leading to the glacis and walked out. "What is all this," he shouted. "What do you want?" A horrible noise swelled up, like animals howling, but worse. We heard stones falling on to the glacis. He was pale when he came in again, but he tried to smile as he shut and bolted the door. "More of them than I thought, and in a nasty mood too. They will repent in the morning. I foresee gifts of tamarinds in syrup and ginger sweets tomorrow."

"Tomorrow will be too late," said Aunt Cora, "too late for ginger sweets or anything else."

My mother was not listening to either of them. She said, "Pierre is asleep and Myra is with him, I thought it better to leave him in his own room, away from this horrible noise. I don't know. Perhaps." She was twisting her hands together, her wedding ring fell off and rolled into a corner near the steps.

My stepfather and Mannie both stooped for it, then Mannie straightened up and said, "Oh, my God, they get at the back, they set fire to the back of the house." He pointed to my bedroom door which I had shut after me, and smoke was rolling out from underneath.

I did not see my mother move she was so quick, opened the door of my room and then again I did not see her, nothing but smoke. Mannie ran after her, so did Mr. Mason but more slowly. Aunt Cora got up and put her arm round me. She said, "Don't be afraid, you are quite safe. We are all quite safe." Just for a moment I shut my eyes and rested my head against her shoulder. She smelled of vanilla, I remember, then there was another smell of burnt hair and I looked and my mother was in the room carrying Pierre. It was her loose hair that had burnt and was smelling like that.

I thought, Pierre is dead. He looked dead. He was white and he did not make a sound, but his head hung back over her arm

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as if he had no life at all and his eyes were rolled up so that you only saw the whites. My stepfather said, "Annette, you are hurt—your hands . . ." but she did not even look at him.

"His crib was on fire," she said to Aunt Cora. "The little room is on fire and Myra was not there. She has gone. She was not there."

"That does not surprise me at all," said Aunt Cora. She laid Pierre on the sofa, bent over him, then she lifted up her skirt, stepped out of her white petticoat and began to tear it into strips.

"She left him, she ran away and left him alone to die," said my mother, still whispering. So it was all the more dreadful when she began to scream abuse at Mr. Mason, calling him a fool, a cruel stupid fool. "I told you," she said, "I told you what would happen again and again." Her voice broke, but still she screamed, "You would not *listen*, you sneered at me, you grinning hypocrite, you ought not to live either, you know so much, don't you? Why don't you go out and ask them to let you go, and listen when they answer? Say how innocent you are. Say you have always trusted them."

I was so shocked that everything was confused. And it happened quickly. I saw Mannie and Sass staggering along with two large earthenware jars of water which were kept in the pantry. They threw the water into the bedroom and it made a black pool on the floor, but the smoke rolled over the pool. Then Christophine, who had run into my mother's bedroom for the pitcher there, came back and whispered to my aunt. "It seems they have fired the other side of the house," said Aunt Cora. "They must have climbed that tree outside. This place is going to burn like tinder and there is nothing we can do to stop it. The sooner we get out the better."

Mannie said to the boy, "You frightened?" Sass shook his head. "Then come on," said Mannie. "Out of my way," he said and pushed Mr. Mason aside. Narrow wooden stairs led down from the pantry to the outbuildings, the kitchen, the servants' rooms, the stables. That was where they were going.

"Take the child," Aunt Cora told Christophine, "and come."

It was very hot on the glacis too, they roared as we came out, then there was another roar behind us. I had not seen any flames, only smoke and sparks but now I saw tall flames shooting up to the sky for the bamboos had caught. There were some tree ferns near, green and damp, one of those was smouldering too.

"Come quickly," said Aunt Cora, and she went first, holding my hand. Christophine followed carrying Pierre and they were quite silent as we came down the glacis. But when I looked

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round for my mother I saw that Mr. Mason, his face crimson with heat, seemed to be dragging her along and she was holding back, struggling.

I heard him say, "It's impossible, it's too late now. Better not go back."

"Wants her jewel-case?" Aunt Cora said.

"Jewel-case? Nothing so sensible," bawled Mr. Mason. "She wants to go back for her damned parrot. I won't allow it." She did not answer, only fought him silently, twisting like a cat and showing her teeth.

Our parrot was called Coco, a green parrot. He didn't talk very well, he could say, Qui est là ? and answer himself, Che Coco, Che Coco. After Mr. Mason clipped his wings he grew very bad-tempered, and though he would sit quietly on my mother's shoulder, he darted at anyone who came near her and pecked their feet. I did not like him very much.

"Annette," said Aunt Cora. "They are laughing at you, do not allow them to laugh at you." She stopped fighting then and he half-supported, half-pulled her after us, swearing loudly.

Still they were quiet and there were so many of them I could hardly see any grass or trees. There must have been many of the bay people there but I recognised none. They all looked the same, it was the same faces repeated over and over, eyes gleaming mouths half open to shout. We were past the mounting stone when they saw Mannie driving the carriage round the corner. Sass followed, riding one horse and leading another. There was a lady's saddle on the one he was leading.

Somebody yelled loudly, "But look the black Englishman! Look the white niggers!" then they were all yelling it. "Look the white niggers! Look the damn white niggers!" A stone just missed Mannie's head, he cursed back at them and they cleared away from the rearing, frightened horses.

"Come on, for God's sake," said Mr. Mason. "Get to the carriage, get to the horses." But we could not move for they pressed too close round us. Some of them were laughing and waving sticks, some of the ones at the back were carrying flambeaux and it was as light as day. Aunt Cora held my hand very tightly and her lips moved but I could not hear because of the noise. And I was afraid, because I knew that the ones who laughed would be the worst. I shut my eyes and waited. Mr. Mason stopped swearing and began to pray in a loud and pious voice. The prayer ended, "May Almighty God defend us." And God who is indeed mysterious, who had made no sign when they burnt Pierre's crib as he slept—not a clap of thunder, not a

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flash of lightning—mysterious God heard Mr. Mason at once and answered him. For the yells stopped.

I opened my eyes, everybody was looking up and pointing at Coco on the glacis railings with his feathers alight. He made an effort to fly down but his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching. He was all on fire.

I began to cry. "Don't look," said Aunt Cora. "Don't look." She stopped and put her arms round me and I hid my face, but I could feel that they were not so near. I heard someone say something about bad luck and remembered that it was the most unlucky thing in the world to kill a parrot, or even to see a parrot die. They began to go then, quickly, silently, and those that were left drew aside and watched us as we trailed across the grass. They were not laughing any more.

"Get to the carriage, get to the carriage," said Mr. Mason. "Hurry!" He went first holding my mother's arm, then Christophine carrying Pierre, and Aunt Cora was last, still holding my hand. None of us looked back.

Mannie had stopped the horses at the bend of the cobblestone road and as we got closer we heard him shout, "What all you are, eh? Brute beasts?" He was speaking to a group of men and a few women who were standing round the carriage. A light-coloured man with a machete in his hand was holding the bridle. I did not see Sass or the other two horses. "Get in," said Mr. Mason. "Take no notice of him, get in." The man with the machete said no. He would go to police and tell a lot of damn lies but a woman said to let us go. All this an accident and they had plenty witness. Myra she witness for us.

"You shut your mouth," the man said. "You mash centipede, mash it, leave one little piece and it grow again . . . Who you think police believe, eh? You, or the white nigger."

Mr. Mason stared at him. He seemed not frightened, but too astounded and bewildered to speak. Mannie took up the carriage whip but one of the blacker men wrenched it out of his hand snapped it over his knee and threw it away, laughing. "Run away, black Englishman, like the boy run. Hide in the bushes. It's better for you."

It was Aunt Cora who stepped forward and said, "The little boy is very badly hurt. He will die if we cannot get help for him."

The man said, "So black and white, they burn the same, eh?"

"They do," she said. "Here and hereafter, as you will find out. Very shortly."

He let the bridle go and thrust his face close to hers. He'd throw her on the fire, he said, if she put bad luck on him. Old

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white jumby, he called her. But she did not back away an inch, she looked straight into his eyes and threatened him with eternal fire in a calm voice. "And never a drop to cool your burning tongue," she said. He cursed her again but he backed away.

"Now get in," said Mr. Mason. "You, Christophine, get in the child." Christophine got in. "Now you," he said to my mother. But she had turned and was looking back at the burning house and when he put his hand on her arm, she screamed loudly.

One woman said she only come to see what happen. Another woman began to cry. The man with the cutlass said, "You cry for her—when she ever cry for you? Tell me that."

But now I turned too. The house was burning and the yellow-red sky, like sunset, behind it, and I knew that I would never see Coulibri again. Nothing would be left, the golden ferns and the silver ferns, the orchids, the ginger lilies and the roses, the rocking-chairs and the blue sofa, the jasmine and the honeysuckle, and the picture of *The Miller's Daughter*. When they had finished there would be nothing left but blackened walls and the mounting stone. That was always left, it was not worth the trouble to steal it.

Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass.

"I saw my plait, tied with red ribbon, when I got up," I said. "In the chest of drawers. I thought it was a snake."

"Your hair had to be cut off. You've been very ill, my darling," said Aunt Cora. "But you are safe with me now. We are all safe as I told you we would be. Remember? You must stay in bed though. Why are you wandering about the room? Your hair will grow again," she said. "Longer and thicker."

"But darker," I said.

"Why not darker?"

She picked me up and I was glad to feel the soft mattress and glad to be covered with a cool sheet.

"It's time for your arrowroot," she said and went out. When that was finished she took the cup away and stood looking at me.

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"I got up because I wanted to know where I was."

"And you do know, don't you?" she said in an anxious voice.

"Of course. But how did I get to your house in Spanish Town?"

"In a hammock. The Luttrells were very good. As soon as Mannie got to Nelson's Rest they sent a hammock and four men. You were shaken about a good deal though. But they did their best. Young Mr. Luttrell rode alongside you all the way. Wasn't that kind?"

"Yes," I said. She didn't look gay any more and her hair wasn't arranged prettily so I shut my eyes, not wanting to see her.

"Is my mother here too? Is Pierre? No, he is dead, isn't he?"

"He died on the way down, the poor little boy," she said.

He died before that, I thought but was too tired to speak.

"Your mother is in the country. Resting. Getting well again. You will see her quite soon."

"I didn't know she'd gone away," I said.

"Of course not. You've been very ill for nearly six weeks. You didn't know anything."

What was the use of telling her that I'd been awake before and heard my mother screaming, "Qui est là? Qui est là?" then, "Don't touch me. I'll kill you if you touch me. Coward. Hypocrite. I'll kill you." I'd pulled the sheet over my head so that her screams weren't so loud and terrible. I slept and everything was quiet.

Still Aunt Cora stayed by my bed looking at me.

"My head is bandaged up. It's so hot," I said. "Will I have a mark on my forehead?"

"No, no." She smiled for the first time. "Your forehead is healing very nicely. It won't spoil you on your wedding day," she said.

She bent down and kissed me. "Is there anything you want? A cool drink to sip?"

"No, not a drink. Sing to me. I like that."

She began in a shaky voice:

"*Every night at half past eight*
Comes tap tap tapping—"

"Not that one. I don't like that one. Sing, *Before I was set free.*"

She sat near me and sang very softly, "Before I was set free."

I heard as far as, "The sorrow that my heart feels for—" I didn't hear the end but I heard that before I slept, "The sorrow that my heart feels for."

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MARRY CHRISTMAS

A fairy-tale for adults
by VICTOR FRANCIS

HELL . . ." said the Duchess. "Take your hand away . . ." Hastily I removed my hand from the sherry decanter and she continued with a disapproving sigh, "Hell, as I was saying, is the name of the village in Norway whence this child comes. I may add that I instantly disbelieved Hughie when he told me, but I have since discovered the place in the gazetteer and must therefore accept its existence."

I was idly rattling the glasses on their silver tray and she interrupted irritably, "Oh very well, have a sherry—just one, mind you—if it will stop that infernal tinkling. Where was I?"

"Hell?" I suggested.

She glared. "Precisely. And if it were not bad enough having an inhabitant of Hell under one's roof, what, pray, do you think the child's name is?"

"Eurydice?"

"Don't be flippant, Charles. Her name is Christmas. The obvious reason is that she was born on December the 25th. While charity compels me to appreciate her parents' problem in naming their seventh daughter, I do think they might have been more considerate. How can I possibly permit my son to marry into Hell and form an alliance with a festive season? Really, it's too trying."

"But are you sure Hughie wants to marry her?"

"You may stop tinkling the glasses again, and you may not have another sherry. Of course I'm sure. Why else should he have brought her all the way here from . . . from that village?"

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It was indeed puzzling, because while it was unlike Hughie to bring a stray girlfriend home to stay with the family over Christmas, it was equally unlike my cousin to indicate any intention of marriage. My reflections were shattered by the realisation of what my aunt was saying. ". . . And that, dear Charles, is where you must help."

I knew from experience that whenever she called me dear Charles I was under orders. "Help? Me? How?"

"You must devote your Christmas holiday to this child—concentrate on her, charm her, take her out and about, and remove her attention from Hughie."

"Oh, but look here, Aunt . . ."

"Kindly remove that pained expression. I have never hitherto perceived any backwardness in competing with your cousin for his friends."

"Yes, but not if it's a question of marriage."

"Nor have I observed any lack of skill in your avoidance of matrimony."

"Yes, but. . ."

"Nor do I propose to put up the necessary funds to buy a partnership for any nephew of mine who is unwilling to please his old aunt."

"Yes, but . . ."

The door opened, and I looked up, and then I interrupted the flood tide of my aunt's oratory. "Not another word, *dear* Aunt," I said. "I shall be delighted to help you. Won't you introduce me to Miss Christmas?"

With the exuberant tastelessness which seems to characterise the officers of his regiment, Hughie said to me cheerfully, "I say, she's one of Hell's belles all right, isn't she old boy, don't you think, hmmmm?"

My frown was only partly caused by dislike of his pun. Much more, it sprang from an uneasy sense of guilt. Hughie was horribly healthy, raucously regimental and guileless to a ghastly degree—but he was my cousin; and for the last three days before he came home I had been spending every minute of my time with the girl whom, presumably, he hoped to marry. "Yes, she certainly is lovely," I answered, "even if her English is a bit odd. I—er—I've been seeing quite a lot of her."

"Jolly fine."

"Squiring her around, you know."

"Tower of London, and all that? Jolly splendid."

"And I did—er—show her a night-spot."

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"Jolly good."

I felt even more guilty as I remembered the night before. We had theatred and gone on to a supper club, and after several hours of obeying my aunt's instructions I had become uncomfortably aware that hair the colour of hock, eyes like the sky over the spring-time Alps, and a lissom figure were supplanting all thoughts of my cousin. It was four in the moon-washed morning when we got home and Christmas looked solemnly at me and said, "It was a farry beautiful evening—thonk you."

I would never have thought that "Thonk you" could sound adorable, and I found myself saying, "It's a shame to say good night so early. Wouldn't you like to come up to my room and listen to some records or something?"

Long lashes parted to disclose new depths to the Alpine sky as she answered, "Pliss? In Norway this would be considered varry wrong, but if you say it is proper in England . . . It is all right in England? Yes?"

Then I realised I was sunk. For I kissed her lightly on the cheek, said, "Well, perhaps it is a little late," left her at her door and spent the next hour wondering what had come over me.

I collected my thoughts with a start as I realised that Hughie was still braying. ". . . And that, Charles old boy, is where you must help."

"Help? Me? How?"

"Well, it's obvious, isn't it? P'raps I'd better tell you from the beginning. When I was holidaying in Norway last summer, I over-spent. Daren't tell the old lady I was broke . . . you know her. But dammit if I didn't fall in with this Norwegian family, who insisted I'd be their guest. Said they owed it to a stranded stranger or something, and they were absolutely splendid with the hospitality. Well, I couldn't repay them—anyway I didn't have the cash—so I said I'd reciprocate . . . why not send one of their family over to stay with us, and so on.

"Course, I thought no more about it, but bless me if I didn't get a letter asking if one of the girls could come over to improve her English. And . . ."

"And that explains Christmas. But what about marrying her?"

Hughie's ever-open mouth dropped another notch. "*Marry* her? Good heavens above—what are you talking about?"

"But I thought you wanted to marry the girl."

He chuckled with a sound like Sandhurst boots. "Lord, no! But someone's got to look after her. Actually I was hoping to concentrate on Cynthia Denbigh. And I wondered if you'd sort

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of take on Christmas for me?" Suddenly I realised that Hughie was really not a bad fellow. "Not another word," I said. "I shall be delighted to help you."

I'm not quite sure when I fell in love with Christmas. All I know is that by December the 24th I felt nine feet tall and had discovered with a benevolent surprise that the house was filled with really very nice people—even Hughie's Cynthia Denbigh, whom I had loathed ever since she defeated me at a gymkhana when I was ten.

It was late on the 24th when I conducted Christmas on a tour of the decorations, and in the library she said, "The holly barries are varry gay, yes?"

"No," I corrected, "but the holly *berries* are *very* gay."

She laughed. "Oh, I never learn. But what is the white barry . . . berry . . . please?"

I walked her beneath the mistletoe, took a deep breath and started to explain. Her eyes were very wide, and after a time I stopped explaining and kissed her instead. I suppose that was when I knew I was in love with her, and for a falling instant her kiss answered me with unspoken words that I do not intend to repeat here.

Then she stepped away from me and I saw that she was

coming in

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crying. I said the idiotic things that otherwise sensible Englishmen are apt to say when confronted with tears. I asked her why, and she cried the more. I told her that I loved her, and she cried even louder.

I shut the library door and sat her on the chaise-longue that for twenty years had been reserved to my aunt's pug, and I said very quietly, "But, Christmas, dear Christmas, I love you, and I know I'm not all that wonderful, but it can't be so depressing to have me love you? Can it?"

"It is not kind to say that to me, and make me feel like this for you," she sobbed.

"Not kind? What are you talking about?"

"It is not fair. I must take the first farry-boat home."

"*Ferry*-boat," I corrected automatically. "And you will do nothing of the sort. You will please explain what all this is about."

"It is you who should explain. What about this, this Cynthia Danbigh?"

"*Denbigh*. What about her?"

"How can you say you love me when you are infatuated with her?"

"Infatuated? But I can't stand the girl! If you'd seen the way she cut in at that gymkhana . . . most abominably unfair riding. How anybody can . . ."

Then I glimpsed the first tiny ray of light. "Infatuated," I said. "That's a long word for a girl who doesn't know much English."

Christmas was trying to stop sniffling. "That is the word your aunt used; she said you were infatuated with this Cynthia Danbigh . . . Denbigh."

"And what else did my aunt say?"

"She said would I please be varry nice to you, and go out with you a lot, so that you would not have time to attend to this Cynthia. Why do you laugh?"

It was some time before I could stop laughing, and by then I was so infectiously light-headed that Christmas was laughing too. "And so your aunt told *you* to concentrate on *me*," she gasped when I explained.

"And she told *you* to concentrate on *me*!"

When we stopped laughing we kissed, and this time there were no tears, and then my aunt's voice sounded from the doorway, "It is usual, I believe, to confine that sort of conduct to the proximity of the mistletoe."

We turned, and I swear that she was twinkling. "I thought

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you would like to know," she said, "that your cousin is about to announce his engagement to the Denbigh girl. Extraordinarily fortuitous. My husband always used to say it was ridiculous that the two estates should be split up. Do you find something amusing, Charles?"

"Oh no," I muttered, taking Christmas' hand.

"There is nothing amusing about matrimony, Charles. You as a lawyer should know that. In fact, if you were safely . . . er, happily . . . married to a sensible wife, I should have far less hesitation in buying you your partnership."

Before I could answer, the clock began to chime. It was midnight. I turned to Christmas. "It's Christmas Day, darling," I said. "Your day. Happy birthday . . . Happy Christmas."

Her eyes were glistening. "Marry Christmas, dear Charles."

"*Merry* Christmas," I began to correct her.

"Don't be a fool, boy," said my aunt. "This is no time to improve her English."

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Remember the opening words of *Marry Christmas*? There is a story behind how they came to be written. When writers meet, they often argue about the most intriguing beginning a story could possibly have. They usually end by quoting some variant of the classic example: "Hell . . ." said the Duchess. "Take your hand away . . ." because this is cynically supposed to have everything to seize the reader's attention—profanity, aristocracy, sex, conflict. The trouble is that for years it has been assumed that it was impossible to write a printable story with this opening.

Victor Francis was challenged to do so. As you have seen, he met the challenge. Now Argosy challenges you, just for fun. Can you invent an irresistible opening sentence for a story—one calculated to intrigue the reader up to the hilt? Original, please—and printable.

Not more than twenty words, on a postcard, with your full name and address, and sent to: Argosy, 1-2 Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.)

Entries must be received by Monday, 1 February, 1965, and there's a prize of £5 for the one which amuses the Editor most. The result will be announced in the April Argosy, on sale 10 March.

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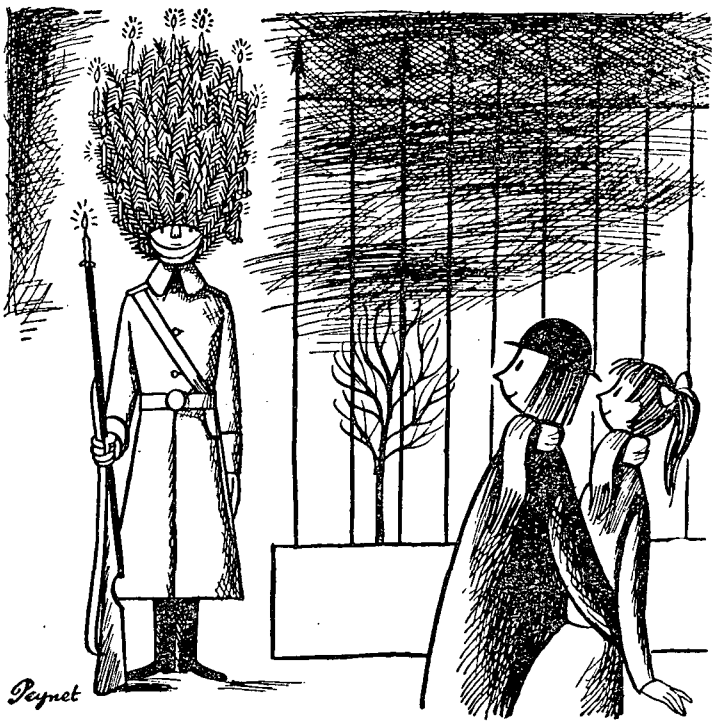

" Joyeux Noel ! "

QUARTET is a selection of drawings from L'Amour

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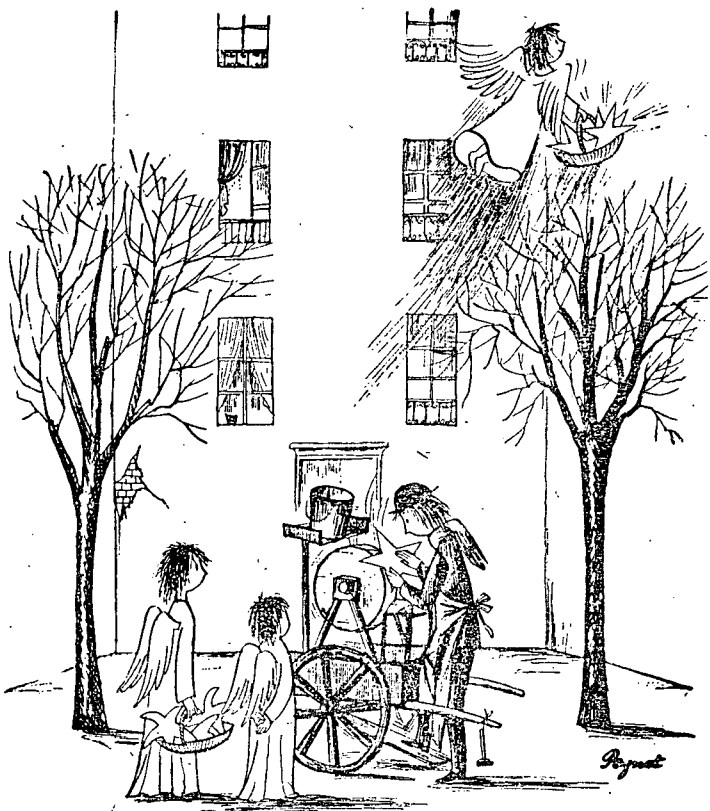

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Quartet *by Peynet*

" Mine's all twisted ! "

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The satisfaction of being proved right !

THE HUMANIST

BY ROMAIN GARY

AT the time of the Führer Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany, there lived in Munich one Karl Loewy, manufacturer of children's toys, a kind, jovial, optimistic bon vivant who was a great believer in human nature, good cigars, good books, and democracy. Although somewhat non-Aryan himself, Herr Karl refused to take the new Chancellor's anti-Semitic proclamations too seriously, convinced that reason, moderation, and a certain innate sense of justice, so profoundly embedded in the hearts of men, would soon triumph over all their ugly, but temporary, aberrations.

To the warnings showered upon him by his Jewish friends, who were packing their bags, urging him to follow them into exile, Herr Loewy answered with a robust laugh and, wedged solidly in his comfortable armchair, a cigar between his round, gourmet's lips, reminisced aloud about certain firm, nay, unshakeable friendships he had made in the trenches during the war of 1914-1918—men now in high places who would not fail to act in his behalf, should the need ever arise.

He offered his anxious visitors a glass of liqueur, and raised his own " to human nature," in which, he said, he had complete confidence, whether it was disguised in a Nazi uniform or a Prussian one, a Tyrolean hat or a worker's cap. And indeed the first years of the regime were, for friend Karl, neither over-perilous nor even painful. There were, of course, certain vexations, a few rather crude practical jokes, but either because the " friendships of the trenches " had indeed operated discreetly in his favour, or because his typically German air of jovial self-assurance had delayed inquiries into his case, the fact was that while everyone whose grandmother was not all she should have been was en route to exile, our friend Karl continued to live calmly between his

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toy factory and his library, his cigars and his good cellar, sustained by his optimism and the unshakeable trust he placed in the human race. Then came the war, and things deteriorated rapidly.

One fine day, access to his factory was brutally denied him, and the next morning some young men in uniform threw themselves on him and beat him up. Herr Karl wiped the blood from his face and proceeded to make a few calls here and there, but the " friendships of the trenches " no longer answered the telephone. For the first time, he felt a little worried.

He went into his library and gazed a long time at the shelves that lined the walls. He brooded over his books: these accumulated treasures all spoke in favour of men, defended them, pleaded in their behalf, and begged Herr Karl not to lose heart, not to despair, Plato, Montaigne, Erasmus, Descartes, Heine . . . He must have faith in those true spokesmen for the species; he must be patient, he must leave time for the permanent human qualities of goodness, tolerance and reason to find their way once more through the chaos and misunderstandings of the age. The French had even devised a splendid expression for this; they said, Chassez le naturel, il revient au galop: chase human nature away, and it will come back at a gallop. They were right, of course, but it was obvious now that it might take some time. He must not give way to pessimism and defeatism; yet, all the same, it might be a good idea to take certain precautions.

Herr Karl sat down in his armchair and began to think.

He was a plump man, with a pink complexion, gaily glinting spectacles and delicate lips whose smiling outlines seemed to have preserved the trace of all the witty things they had uttered.

He stared for a long time at his books, his boxes of cigars, at the bottle of old burgundy by his side, as though to ask their advice, and gradually his eyes grew brighter, a conspiratorial smile spread across his face, and he raised his glass towards the thousands of volumes in the library, as though to assure them of his loyalty.

Herr Karl had in his employ a couple of good Müncheners who had taken care of him for fifteen years. The wife served as cook and housekeeper; the husband acted as chauffeur, gardener and watchman. Herr Schutz had only one passion: reading. After his work was done, while his wife was knitting, he would sit for hours over a good book Herr Karl had lent him. His favourite authors were Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Erasmus. He read the noblest and most inspired passages aloud to his wife in the little cottage they occupied at the other end of the garden. Often,

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when Herr Karl felt a little lonesome, he invited his friend Schutz into the library, and there, cigars between their lips, they engaged in long discussions on the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, humanism, freedom, progress, and all those great truths that were to be found in the books which surrounded them with their reassuring presence.

Hence it was to friend Schutz and his wife that Herr Karl turned in this hour of peril. He took a box of cigars and a bottle of schnapps, made his way to the little cottage at the other end of the garden and explained his plan to his friends.

The very next day, Herr and Frau Schutz set to work.

The carpet was rolled up, the floor sawed through, and a ladder installed connecting the library with the cellar. The old cellar door was walled up. A good part of the library was transferred to the hide-out, followed by the boxes of cigars ; the wine and the liqueurs were there already. Frau Schutz arranged the place as comfortably as possible, and in a few days, with that typically German sense of Gemütlichkeit, the cellar had become a pleasant, snug little room. The hole in the parquet was carefully concealed by a well-matched panel and covered over by the carpet.

Then Herr Karl went out into town for the last time, accompanied by Herr Schutz, and arranged a fictive sale to avoid the confiscation of his factory and house. Herr Schutz insisted on signing counter-deeds that would permit the legitimate owner to resume possession of his property at the appropriate time. Then the two accomplices returned to the house, shook hands, and Herr Karl, a sly smile on his lips, went down into his hiding-place to await in safety and comfort the return of better times.

Twice a day, at noon and at seven, Frau Schutz lifted the carpet, slid back the panel, and carried down into the cellar a tray of succulent dishes. In the evening, Herr Schutz would come to discuss some immortal subject with his friend and employer over a glow of wine: the rights of man, tolerance, reason, the coming age of enlightenment and the importance in our difficult lives of reading the works of the classic masters. And the little cellar seemed to glow, illuminated by those generous and inspired views, by man's unshakeable confidence in his own nature.

At first, Herr Karl also had the newspapers sent down and kept his radio set beside him, but after six months or so, inasmuch as the news was growing more and more discouraging, and the world truly seemed to be hastening to perdition, he had the radio removed in a gesture of defiance, so that no echo of a transient

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reality should breach the strength of his spirit, and with his arms crossed over his chest, a smile on his lips, he held fast to his beliefs deep in his cellar fortress, refusing all contact with a futile if hideous actuality.

Finally he even refused to look at the newspapers, which were far too depressing, and was content to reread the masterpieces of his library, drawing from those refutations, with which the permanent confounded the transitory, the strength he needed to preserve his humanistic creed.

Herr Schutz and his wife moved into the main house, which was miraculously spared by the bombings. At the factory, there were some initial difficulties, but the papers were there to prove that Herr Schutz had become the legitimate owner of the business after Herr Karl's flight abroad.

Life by artificial light and the lack of fresh air and exercise further increased Herr Karl's corpulence, and his cheeks, as the years passed, lost their pink glow, but his optimism and his confidence in humanity remained intact. He sat firm in his cellar waiting, as Saint Thomas said, "for the milk of human kindness to flow freely upon the earth," and, although the news friend Schutz brought him from the outside world was extremely bad, he refused to despair.

Some years after the fall of the Hitler regime, a Jewish friend of Herr Karl's, having returned from exile, came and knocked at the door of the house in Schillerstrasse.

A tall, greying, slightly stooped man with a studious-looking face opened the door. He was still holding a work by Goethe in his hand. No, Herr Loewy no longer lived here. No, it was not known what had become of him. He had vanished without a trace, and all inquiries made since the end of the war had produced no results. Grüss Gott! The door closed. Herr Schutz turned around and walked towards the library. His wife had already prepared the tray. Now that good Doctor Adenauer's Germany enjoyed abundance once more, she spoiled Herr Karl by cooking him the most delicious dishes she could imagine. The carpet was rolled up and the panel in the floor pulled back. Herr Schutz set the volume of Goethe on the table and went down the stairs, carrying the tray.

Herr Karl is much weaker now, and suffers from phlebitis. Further, his heart is beginning to weaken. He needs a doctor, but he cannot expose the Schutzes to such a risk; they would be lost if it were known that they had for years been hiding a humanist Jew in their cellar. They must all be patient and arm

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themselves against doubt; justice, reason and the natural goodness of man would soon regain the upper hand. Above all, they must not be discouraged.

Herr Karl, though quite altered physically from his former self, preserves all his optimism, and his faith in humanity is unimpaired. Every day, when Herr Schutz comes down to the cellar with the bad news—Hitler's occupation of England had been a particularly harsh blow—it is Herr Karl who encourages him and cheers him up by some wise or witty remark. He points to the books along the walls and reminds his good friend that the human heart always prevails in the end, and that this was how the greatest masterpieces of literature had come into being—they were born out of this very confidence and faith. Herr Schutz always comes up from the cellar greatly reassured.

The toy factory flourishes remarkably: in 1950, Herr Schutz was able to enlarge it and double the sales figure: he has handled the business more than competently. He has a chauffeur-driven Mercedes now, and a rôle in the local Christian-Democratic party.

Every morning, Frau Schutz takes a bouquet of fresh flowers downstairs and places it at Herr Karl's bedside. She plumps up his pillow, helps him to change his position and feeds him with a spoon, for he no longer has the strength to feed himself. Indeed he is so frail that he can scarcely speak; but sometimes his eyes fill with tears, his grateful gaze rests on the faces of the fine, good people who have so richly justified his confidence in them and in human nature in general. It is clear that Herr Karl will die a happy man, with Schiller, Goethe and Erasmus at his side, clasping in each hand the hand of a loyal friend, and with the satisfaction of having been proved right. © Romain Gary 1964

AGONY COLUMN

Q: "I had composed myself to sleep when a strange girl came climbing through my window. I called out in alarm, 'Who are you?' No reply. So I jumped from my blanket and shouted, 'Go back through the window or I will kick you.' And she went. Now I am wondering if I did wrong? After all, I did not know her."

A: You could have been politer. Better to have asked why she came through the window, before escorting her out through the door. If a lion had been chasing her, it might have eaten her when you forced her back through the window.

Quoted from Tell Me, Josephine, an anthology of letters from readers of the Central African Mail.

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Christmas is coming, the geese are getting fat,
Please put a penny in an old man's hat.
If you haven't got a penny, a ha'penny will do,
If you haven't got a ha'penny, God bless you.

Beggar's Rhyme

Joys to Come

In those cold December days the tree was very happy, thinking of the pleasures to come. He had heard of the delights of Christmas Eve: the stealthy setting-up of the tree, the tinsel balls and coloured toys and stars, the peppermint canes and birds with spun-glass tails. Even that old anxiety of Christmas trees—burning candles—did not worry him, for he had been told that nowadays people use strings of tiny electric bulbs which cannot set one on fire. So he looked forward to the festival with a confident heart.

"I shall be very grand," he said. "I hope there will be children to admire me. It must be a great moment when the children hang their stockings on you!" He even felt sorry for the first trees that were chosen and taken away. It would be best, he considered, not to be bought until Christmas Eve. Then, in the shining darkness someone would pick him out, put him carefully along the running-board of a car, and away they would go. The tyre-chains would clack and jingle merrily on the snowy road. He imagined a big house with fire glowing on a hearth; the hushed rustle of wrapping paper and parcels being unpacked. Someone would say, "Oh, what a beautiful tree!" How erect and stiff he would brace himself in his iron tripod stand...

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, *The Tree That Didn't Get Trimmed*

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Bought for a Song

Carol-singing at Christmas was the greatest pleasure of all, and the most profitable . . . We looked to Christmas-time as our chief opportunity of making money on a more generous scale. We ended up the Christmas tired and pleased, with hoarse throats, but plenty of oranges, dates, chocolates, and sweets. We made sometimes 12s. 6d. sometimes 15s., and once something short of a pound. I determined to buy Mother a present; went into a ladies' shop, and with some confusion, asked the price of a black and white silk scarf. I had expected it to be 10s. at the most. It was 15s. 6d. Inwardly horrified, but too shy and proud to retreat, I bought it: practically all my carol-singing money vanished at one go! However the scarf still exists; it was evidently good value.

A. L. ROWSE, *A Cornish Childhood*

Kissing Bunch

There had never been such preparations. Paul and Arthur scoured the land for holly and evergreens. Annie made the pretty paper hoops in the old-fashioned way. And there was unheard-of-extravagance in the larder. Mrs. Morel made a big and magnificent cake. Then, feeling queenly, she showed Paul how to blanch almonds. He skinned the long nuts reverently, counting them all, to see not one was lost. It was said that eggs whisked better in a cold place. So the boy stood in the scullery, where the temperature was nearly at freezing-point, and whisked and whisked, and flew in excitement to his mother as the white of egg grew stiffer and more snowy.

"Just look, mother! Isn't it lovely?"

And he balanced a bit on his nose, then blew it in the air.

"Now, don't waste it," said the mother.

Everybody was mad with excitement. William was coming on Christmas Eve. Mrs. Morel surveyed the pantry. There was a big plum cake, and a rice cake, jam tarts, lemon tarts, and mince-pies—two enormous dishes. She was finishing cooking—Spanish tarts and cheese-cakes. Everywhere was decorated. The kissing bunch of berried holly was hung with bright and glittering things, and spun slowly over Mrs. Morel's head as she trimmed her little tarts in the kitchen. A great fire roared. There was a scent of cooked pastry. He was due at seven o'clock, but he would be late. The three children had gone to meet him. She was alone . . . Only by the careful way in which she did things could it be told how much moved she was.

D. H. LAWRENCE, *Sons and Lovers*

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Tony Lane,
38 Baldwell Road,
St. Albans.

Dear Father Christmas,

I hop you are well Will you bring my sister a black doll please Father Christmas will you bring me a pencel if you can spare them and a flying kit

Love from
Maureen and Tony Lane

And will you bring my dog a bone xxxxxx

Merry Christmas!

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; indeed, as Mrs. Cratchit said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish) they hadn't ate it all at last!

Hullo! A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastry-cook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That was the pudding! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered—flushed but smiling proudly—with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half a quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! . . .

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovelful of chestnuts on the fire.

Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass—two tumblers; and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire spluttered and crackled noisily.

Then Bob proposed: "A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!"

CHARLES DICKENS, *A Christmas Carol*

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On and on he went, panic rising in his throat

AVALANCHE

BY MEIR RONNEN

THE passengers in the cable-car could hear the avalanche before they could see it. There was a dull rumble at first, hardly louder than that of the wheels on the suspension cable. Then it became a roar, dashed around the pylon supporting the cable, and thundered on downhill. The pylon buckled just as the car reached it, keeling over like a stick of plasticine.

André, the Swiss guide, shouted, " Knees up! " but he was the only one who understood what was happening. There was a sickening lurch, a bump, then the crash.

Jimmy Adams, who was standing with the guide at the open front window of the cable-car, was pitched out through it and rolled away down the slope. The guide, who was thrown out under him, was not so lucky, for the car came down on his legs, pinning him in the snow. Then all at once it was quiet, the heavy, snow-blanketed silence broken only by the whimper of a child. Jimmy, lying breathless in a cushion of snow, was surprised to find himself thinking how quiet it was. Then he remembered his wife.

Scrambling to his feet he tried to climb up to the car, but the snow was so deep he sank to his knees and nearly lost his balance. Craning gingerly uphill he could see a line of figures crawling out of the cabin. His wife's head appeared at the window. She picked away some slivers of glass and slid out into the snow; her face cleared as she looked downhill and saw him waving to her.

" What happened? " she called.

" I don't know. An avalanche must have hit the pylon. Is everyone all right? "

Jimmy couldn't remember how many people had been in the cable-car. Eight, possibly nine. Only Dorothy and himself had skis—and the guide of course. The others were all middle-aged

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tourists, one couple with two small boys, whose sled had been placed in the luggage-rack outside the car. He could see the sled splintered against the pylon. All the good skiers had disdained the cableway for the ski piste down to the village, Jimmy had noted with envy. He had felt rather a fool coming down in the car holding his skis in his hand. He wondered now if the skiers had been caught by the avalanche. He looked down the enormous slope. Two miles below, the south side of the village was blotted out by a great cloud of snow. He waded up to where Dorothy was waiting for him.

" There's still someone inside," she said.

Jimmy tried to right the car. It swayed. André screamed. " My God," cried Dorothy, " he's underneath it! " Jimmy dropped back. But the car swayed back with him and lurched slowly over on to its side, shoving Jimmy headfirst into it through the window. There was a thump and he found himself in a sea of legs.

He called to his wife, " I'm all right, I'm inside! "

"André's free! " she answered, " it came off him! "

" Fine," he shouted back, " now let's get the others out! "

The others were an elderly couple and the guard. The latter was underneath him. Jimmy shook him, then saw that his head lolled at a right angle. He had never seen a dead man before but the guard looked very dead to him. The old couple moaned and groaned but appeared to be unhurt. Jimmy tried shoving them through the side window, now facing the sky, and finally knelt on the floor and let them use his back as a step. The husband pushed his wife through the window-frame to where Dorothy was waiting to help her out. Jimmy then heaved out the man, who was wheezing and cursing in Schweizer Deutsch, and hauled himself out after him.

" The guard's dead," he gasped, " I think he broke his neck."

Dorothy paled, then said weakly, " Come over here, quickly. I think André's legs are broken."

Jimmy worked his way around the car and looked down at the unconscious guide. " We've got to get him out of the snow," he said, almost matter-of-factly, " otherwise . . ." He looked around him. A tall man was leading his wife and two small boys, followed by a woman with another child, down the shallow side of the snowfield. About fifty yards ahead of them a dark brown wall showed under the icicles hanging from a snow-covered roof. The avalanche had missed the structure by a matter of feet, to judge by the great gashes of earth and rock showing through the snow. The hillside looked like a tree stripped of bark, Jimmy thought.

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The elderly Swiss couple did not follow. The man, with remarkable composure and in accented but understandable English, asked Jimmy if he would get some skis out of the car cabin, so that they might fashion a stretcher for the guide. After Jimmy had struggled back with them, the man showed him how to tie André's twisted body to the skis, using the rope from the luggage carrier. Finally, looping the free end of the rope under André's shoulders, Jimmy and Dorothy let him slide before them down to the hut. The old couple followed, the man helping his wife to keep her feet. Jimmy did not dare let the guide slide too fast; a half hour passed before they arrived at the half-buried house.

"Good lord," said Dorothy, "it isn't a house at all, it's a barn!"

There was snow on the floor, driven in through the cracks between the planks that made up the walls. However, one wall was frozen in under the banked-up snow outside. The group of dismayed tourists stood together on the far side, like horses in the corner of a wintry field.

"Better than nothing," said the tall man, with an Oxbridge accent, "I suppose we'll have to stay here until help arrives."

Dorothy said, her voice trembling a little, "If it arrives."

"Of course it'll come," said the man, rather loudly, with a reassuring look at the little boy whose hand he was holding, "why shouldn't it come? They must know below that the cable is down."

Jimmy said, "I'm afraid the avalanche has clobbered the station. Lord only knows how much of the village is left. It will be some time before they think of looking up here. And how will they get up?"

"Oh, helicopter I should say," said the tall man after a moment, his face going whiter, "of course there'll be a helicopter. We must make a signal."

"Signal with what?" asked Dorothy. "Anyway that's tomorrow." The man was silent. "That's tomorrow," she went on, "what about tonight? We can't stay here all night. We'll freeze."

"Yes," said the father of the boys, who were hanging on to his every word, as he looked down at them. "Yes . . . well, we'd better think about making a signal anyway."

"Nonsense!" snapped the elderly Swiss, in his heavily-accented but erudite English. "Some of you will have to ski down and bring help—before sunset. It is now," he consulted his watch, "only 2.12 p.m."

"Ski down?" echoed Jimmy, appalled. "We can't ski down!

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Otherwise we wouldn't have been in the car. We don't know how to ski. We're beginners. Someone else can use our skis if you like." He looked around.

" Sorry old boy," said the father, " I've never been on skis in my life. Ski? " he asked the others, pantomiming the stance.

The women shook their heads and the old Swiss snorted, " I wass a gut ski, ja, but it's funfzehn Jahre since I make ski. Bones too brittle. Old bones. One of you young people muss go! "

" We'll freeze here," said the Oxbridge man's wife, speaking for the first time.

" I'll go," said Dorothy. "After all I've had lessons once before."

" Don't be silly," said Jimmy. " You'll never make it. You can't pull up on slopes like this. Anyway, even if you could ski, how would you find your way down? "

" I'll have to. Otherwise we'll freeze."

" No," said Jimmy, taking a deep breath and seeing the terrifying, icy slopes that had so scared him during his lessons, " I'll go then."

" We'll both go."

" No," said Jimmy angrily, for he was even more worried for his wife than he was of his fear of being afraid. " You can't even find your way about the village! I'll go. I ski just as well as you . . . if you can call it skiing," he added with a grin. " Look old girl," he went on, " there's nothing else for it. I'll go slowly and traverse all the time. It'll be easier if I'm on my own and don't have to watch out for you. I'll have them back here in a few hours." Nobody replied. After a moment he went on, " First of all I'll go back to the car and get the sticks."

The cold hit Jimmy as he stepped outside the hut, for he had been warmed up by all his exertions. His ears started to freeze and he quickly pulled down his woollen balaclava. Inside the car, the guard looked deader than ever. Jimmy lifted out all the skis and sticks and stood them in the snow. Then, suppressing a feeling of nausea, he stripped the dead guard of his tunic, pulled his gloves back on his nearly frozen hands, and made his way down to the barn with the coat, sticks, and skis. The sun had gone behind the highest peak on the other side of the valley. It had been 18°c. below when they left in the morning. Since he had taken his gloves off he was more than ever conscious of the cold.

He put his skis on inside the barn, where it was slightly warmer, for he had to take off his gloves again in order to close the ski springs on to his boots, and to clip the rubber straps around his ankles so that he would not lose the ski if he fell and the safety

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spring opened. The shivering group watched him in silence as he pushed down the spring clips. When he straightened up, red in the face from bending over and keeping his balance with his head down, the old Swiss said, his voice full of kindness and anxiety, " Can you find your way to the piste? "

" One can see the village from here, what's left of it," answered Jimmy, " so I know the general direction. But I haven't learnt to turn, not properly, all I can do is stem. I'll have to traverse all the time. Where it's too steep I'll take the skis off and walk."

" Nein nein, it's too slow like that," said the Swiss. " Can you ein kick turn make? " He lifted a straight leg, as though he had a ski on the end of it.

Jimmy nodded. " The standing turn? Yes! That's it. I'll do kick turns after every traverse! "

" Slowly, slowly each time," the old man advised, " do not lose your balance. Ven you fall in zis snow there is kein Mensch to help you up. If your ski is teepf in snei, try and reach for ze shpring and opfen, ja? "

" Thanks," Jimmy nodded. "All right, Dot, I'd better get going. Quicker I get there, the better, eh? "

Dorothy was placing the guard's tunic under André's head. She looked up. " I think he's going, Jimmy," she said. " He was conscious a moment ago. I said you were going down alone. He said you mustn't go alone, Jimmy. Not alone." Her eyes filled with tears. " I'm coming too."

" You must take care of André, and keep everyone moving. Walk round and round. Otherwise you'll never stand the cold. Keep the kids moving, eh? " he gestured at Oxbridge.

The man nodded, his face grey. " Good luck, young man," he said. " We are all depending on you."

Jimmy was about to make a joke, then thought better of it. Dorothy gazed at him, her face set. They looked at each other for a moment and then Jimmy took the ski sticks, looped the thongs over his hands and under his thumbs, and thumped out of the door. He heard it swing closed behind him.

The slope below the hut turned towards the south of the town, but it was the only direction he could take, for the cableway had swung out over an almost vertical drop of more than a thousand feet. A fence cut across the route but only the tops of the posts were showing. He made a mental note to watch out for the wire. Then he pushed off gingerly, keeping his heels out and the skis pointed together in a vee, so that he would not travel too fast, the way André had shown him. But he did not progress at all. Then

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he brought his skis together, and all at once slid away down the slope, gathering speed and trying to make a vee again, but he was going too fast. In a moment he was at the fence and then over it; his skis had not sunk deep enough to be caught by the wire.

The field dropped away below him, getting steeper all the time and he could now see all the way to the bottom of the slope, which was lined with trees. He could not stop. In desperation he tried to turn uphill and leaned in. Then he remembered that André had explained that this would make him go faster. One had to lean out, and forward, but to cramp the edges of the skis uphill. Jimmy tried as he sped on, feeling the intolerable strain on his ankles; but he knew he was still leaning towards the hill. On and down he went, panic rising in his throat. Then in desperation he let himself fall over, on to the side of the hill. The snow braked his body at once. He had stopped and he was unhurt. He lay there for a minute, in utter thankfulness.

Then he tried to get up. He bent his knees, got one stick under him and heaved up. He was halfway to his feet when his skis began to continue their downward journey; and he sank back into the snow. Again he pushed a stick under him. This time it went in to the wrist before it held.

Think, he said to himself. There's a right way and a wrong way to everything. He heard André's voice. *Keep your skis down slope, across the line of the slope. Don't point them downhill. Then you can get up.*

Jimmy twisted round on the snow, raising his legs in the air. He placed the skis in position, then heaved up again. Again he got halfway up, then fell back exhausted. After a moment he tried again, bending his knees under him at the same time. It helped and he came up on his feet with surprising ease. But he was puffed. I must not stop that way again if I can help it. Getting up takes too much strength . . . and time.

The sweat froze on his cheeks. He could feel the fuzz in his nostrils freezing, hair by hair. When he had caught his breath he pushed off down the slope, towards the trees. *No weight on your top ski*, came André's voice. *Bend your knees slightly. No weight on your top ski. When you want to stop, lean forward and push out your heels. Edge your skis. Edge your skis.* Jimmy edged till his ankles groaned again. But he came to a stop. He was almost at the trees.

" I did it," he said aloud. " I stopped without falling over! "

But he had not reached the bottom of the slope. Not wanting to traverse too fast, he had cut more across the slope than down it. He was still too high up; André's voice again: *another kick turn.*

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Jimmy did it too quickly. As he swung the second ski over he lost his balance and fell downhill. His leg twisted under him and he grunted with pain. When he tried to lift the ski he found he could not move it. He twisted his head around. The ski point was deep in the snow.

Jimmy pulled and pulled, he could not get it out. His other ski was over his top leg and he could not move. My God, he thought, I'll freeze if I stay like this. They'll all freeze.

He struggled again. Then he remembered what the old Swiss had told him. He reached back with his hand, fumbling for the dog-leash release on his boot strap. His back protested; he could not reach. He tried putting his head downhill and managed to reach the spring release on his toe clip. It opened.

Jimmy could still not free his foot or his ski, to which his ankle was still tied by the rubber thong with the dog-leash clip; but he could now turn his foot so that his body was no longer painfully twisted. When he did this he could reach the clip. His gloved hand fumbled with the catch. Cursing, he pulled off his glove with his teeth. The metal of the strap clip was so cold to his touch that his sweating hand stuck to the burningly cold metal. Then the catch opened and he was free.

Swivelling the other ski downhill, Jimmy pulled on the glove. One of the sticks fell over and started to slide away. He grabbed it, rammed it into the snow. Carefully taking the loose ski he swung it around and wedged it into the snow so that it would not move. He slid the free ski under him and after brushing as much snow as he could from the bottom of his boot, he clipped it into place. Then holding a stick with both hands, he pushed himself to his feet.

Jimmy's head swam when he bent over to clip back the safety strap. He reached for the second stick, passing the other one to his left hand. But he could not reach far enough uphill to get hold of it.

Trying not to slide forward he cramped his skis over and walked up the hill sideways, just as André had taught him in his first lesson. He reached the stick after three short sidesteps. Then, pushing off, he heard the guide's voice again: *no weight on your top ski.* Trailing his sticks in the snow, he sailed slowly but firmly across and down the hill. The fresh powder snow was so light that he sank almost to his knees; the white flakes creamed away from his legs like the bow wave of a motor-boat. All Jimmy's reaction to the exertion left him; he was exhilarated.

The slope ran into a hollow and turned around itself. Jimmy rode a few yards up the other side and came to a stop. The slope

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was like a wall, so steep he simply leaned against it and rolled over, lifting his skis so that he was facing downhill again. A slight push against the wall of snow and he was again standing, facing the trees. There was a path through the trees. Not a real path but a natural lane. Jimmy took it. There was no other way.

The trees leaned in and banged against him as he passed. He felt his speed growing, branches flicked at his face. The path swerved and he tried to swerve with it, pushing out his ankles. All of a sudden his skis changed direction as he swung his weight from one foot to the other. He realised then that he had to lean to the left to go to the right. He began to find his way through the trees. But as his speed grew, so did his fright. Trees came up as he closed his eyes and he felt them pluck at his sleeves or bump his shoulders. *Bend your knees*, came André's voice, *lean forward.* All at once he was out of the trees, racing on downhill. He was travelling at high speed now; the field reached away below him. Then he recalled what André had shouted to him when he had first tried to make a turn and had flashed off straight downhill instead of coming around diagonally: sit down, he had called, *sit down!*

Holding his elbows in and his sticks out, he sat down sideways, so as not to pull his ankles. Again he swung his skis across the slope and struggled to his feet. He got ready to push off again when he suddenly realised he no longer knew which direction to take. The snowfield seemed ringed by mountains on every side. Because of his twisting route through the forest he could no longer be sure from which direction he had come. There was no house, no landmark in sight.

Jimmy's heart sank as he looked around him. He stood for some minutes trying in vain to get his bearings. Heavy overcast obscured the sun. Once again he began to feel the cold. He thought of Dorothy and the shivering group in the mountain barn and looked at his watch: 3.30 p.m.

Just as he looked up, a skier appeared over the brow of a hill about half a mile to Jimmy's right, his red ski-instructor's jacket bright against the snow. He sailed into view like a bird, twisting his hips in the opposite direction to his skis as he zigzagged down across the valley. Jimmy shouted to him, he shouted for joy. The skier came on and Jimmy shouted and waved his stick above his head. But the skier came on and past him, only a hundred yards to his front and did not turn his head. He went on and down and vanished over a hump at the end of the snowfield.

Jimmy was stunned. It seemed impossible that the skier should not have heard him, but the snow must have deadened the

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sound. Once again there was dead silence; but he now knew which direction to take. Pushing his sticks into the snow in front of him to stop himself sliding off straight downhill, Jimmy worked his skis around one after the other, a few inches at a time, until he was pointing towards the hump where he had last seen the skier. Then he pushed off, coasting across the slope, travelling only slightly downhill. *No weight on your top ski; lean forward.* He got to the hump, which had seemed half a mile away, in a moment, and came to rest right at the top of the rise.

The twin trail of the skier was clearly visible in the virgin snow. It led down at an angle to another wood. Jimmy could also now see to the bottom of the slope he had just traversed. Below it was a gorge that dropped away several hundred feet. If the skier had not appeared Jimmy might have gone on down over the lip of the snowfield and down into the gorge.

Despite his disappointment at not having stopped the skier, Jimmy blessed him as he pushed off in his trail. Almost at the same moment he realised that a ski instructor would take the quickest, steepest route. How could he follow him?

It was too late for consideration. Jimmy was wobbling down across the slope trying to keep his weight on his lower ski. Again he came to a rise. At the summit he saw the ski trail in front of him explode into a fantail of ski marks where the skier had turned around by stamping his skis in the snow. Jimmy followed suit, again using his sticks to stop himself from moving until he was pointed in the direction that the skier had taken. The slope to his left dropped away at a sickeningly steep angle; but as Jimmy followed the trail he found it did not slide sideways down the slope, as he would have expected from an expert skier. Instead, he saw the fan-like marks in the snow where the skier had once more made a standing turn. He came to a stop and followed suit.

Jimmy was mystified. Why should an obviously brilliant skier make a standing turn? He followed the trail again, and saw the twin marks of the skis diverge, the top ski pushing away the snow as the trail approached a flattening in the snow. A wide arc ahead of him showed where the skier had made a stem turn; and Jimmy followed it, stemming with his top ski in the same arc flattened out by the skier ahead of him, so that he did not have to use all his strength to shove the snow away from his ski. To his delight he felt himself coming round and as the slope was not too steep he had no fear of leaning out instead of in. He came round in the same arc as the trail. Bringing his skis together he followed it on downhill. But why should a skier who could Christie down a steep slope use this beginner's turn?

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Then it occurred to Jimmy—the skier was showing him the way down!

But why hadn't he acknowledged Jimmy's shout? Perhaps he had looked back after the second turn and had seen him wobbling down the slope. Jimmy went on down the slope with increasing confidence. There was now someone helping him.

The slope eased out into a large flat bowl and he made a whole series of stem turns, left and right, and as he followed the wide stem marks made in the snow, he felt his speed being braked at just the right point each time he went into a turn. He came to rest on the lip of the bowl. Down to his left was another rock-filled gorge. The only way lay ahead. His heart sank as he saw that it fell away around a ninety degree corner in an almost vertical slope.

The ski marks led out across the slope. Jimmy followed, feeling like a fly hanging against a wall. He looked down; the slope ended about two hundred feet below; he pulled back so suddenly he nearly lost his balance. Wobbling on his downhill ski he leaned in towards the comfort of the slope but this only made him go faster. He heard André saying, *lean out, lean out, edge your skis, push your heels down, lean out, out, out!* He tried, pushed down his heels. Slowly his ski points came uphill. He stopped. The tracks ahead of him came to a dead stop, then seemed to slip back away from each other. He understood even as he heard André say: *now, a kick turn!*

The slope was so steep that he had to knife his skis into the side of the hill to get a foothold. Slowly he lifted his left leg and dug the ski end in the ground in front of him, turning it around to point in the opposite direction. Then he slowly swung the top ski across, until he was facing the other way. The skis began to run with him as soon as he came around. By luck he threw himself forward, more by instinct than anything else, and found he was in control, though travelling fast.

As he came down he saw the trail ahead dissolve into a great smudge that moved sideways downhill. The skier had fallen. Jimmy was going so fast he just had time to follow through with the thought: Fall yourself, against the hill! He leaned against the slope and as he hit it with his shoulder his skis came out of the snow and he went sliding downslope in panic.

Then he realised he was getting down the slope in comparative safety, as long as he remained on his side. He allowed himself to go on sliding, keeping his skis downhill but lifting them out of the snow so as not to impede his progress. When he could slide no farther, Jimmy looked again for the tell-tale marks left by his guide. A few yards below him the skier had got to his feet. The

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ski marks led off along the lip of another gorge; there was only a few inches between them and the almost sheer drop.

His heart was pumping with excitement as he shoved off. He knew there was no use being afraid any more; there was no other way to safety. The trail led over humps now, like a roller-coaster. He tried keeping his skis in the furrows made by the skier in front of him, and although this made the going easier, it also made him go faster. He crouched down, his ski sticks tucked under his arms, keeping his weight as much as he could on his bottom ski. The trail curved out and down, always lipping the gorge. He flashed on, always faster, keeping in the ski furrows ahead of him. Then he tried sheering off into the fresh snow uphill. It slowed him at once and at the next rise he saw, far below him, a road.

Jimmy's heart leapt. There was now only one more descent to be made. His knees were wobbling with the fatigue of the last long loop he had made around the gorge and while he rested, leaning on his sticks, he saw that his guide had gone forward in a sideslide out on to a steep slope that dropped straight to the road three hundred feet below. The ski-marks then pointed straight downhill; the skier had let go with one last burst of real speed.

Jimmy then studied the slide marks carefully. Why had his guide not shown him a beginner's solution? Then he saw that the skier had made the only approach possible. The drop was too steep for anything else. The slide allowed you to go into the drop with your skis pointing across the slope, but after the first stem one would be going too fast to point the skis again. The only way lay straight down. The slope must level out on to the road. If it didn't . . . he did not complete the thought.

He edged forward until his skis were lined up with the beginning of the slide marks. Then he tried pushing sideways over the edge of the drop. Afraid to fall over, he leaned uphill, but did not move. Then he leaned out a little, pushed sideways with his top stick. He shot over the edge.

A half-shriek of fear escaped him as he slipped sideways on to the slope. He threw himself to the other side, then erect as he lost his balance. He tried stemming, but he was speeding; he was dropping straight down. He got his skis together and crouched forward. *Bend your knees*, he heard André say, *lean forward, keep your head up, stand up as you go into a hole, bend your knees as you come out of it.* He was going faster than he believed possible. Surprisingly, it was not more difficult to keep his balance. Then his confidence grew as he could now see that the slope far below came out on to the road. He began to swing from side to side as

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he went on down. He relaxed, almost fell, crouched again, flexing his knees. The wind tore at his cheeks, which were frozen stiff. He came to a depression, stood up as he dropped into it, crouched again as he came over and out of it; down, straight down, faster and faster; he shouted with joy and then, almost to his disappointment, he was down on the icy road.

Carried on by his momentum, he came around a curve in the road. Ahead of him a gang of men with ropes and shovels were standing near a bulldozer, evidently awaiting instructions to move off. The bulldozer completely blocked the road.

Jimmy careened into the group. Hands grabbed at him, steadied him. Everyone was talking at once, in Swiss German. Then a policeman appeared and asked him in good English if he had seen anyone caught in the avalanche. Jimmy told him about the cableway and the policeman shouted to a man with a walkie-talkie. It was 4.45 p.m.

" By the way," said Jimmy, " where's the instructor that came down ahead of me? "

The policeman looked puzzled; " You did not come alone? "

" There was another man, a skier in a red jacket who showed me the way down. I followed him," Jimmy said.

" Nobody came down ahead of you. The road is blocked. We brought the bulldozer through from a side road some thirty minutes ago," said the policeman.

Jimmy did not know what to say. He sat around worrying about his wife and worrying about the mysterious skier until the rescue party brought the group down on stretchers and sleds just after dark. They were suffering from exposure but would be all right. All except the guide, whose red-jacketed figure lay tied in the canvas stretcher. Dorothy said that André had died around 3.30—just about the time, Jimmy now recalled, that he had been standing in the middle of the snowfield, wondering which direction to take.

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THE CAROL SINGERS

Wishing to reward some carol singers, who were performing outside his front door, Good King Wenceslas, in the shape of Mr. Perkins, counted his small change and found that, if he gave each of them 5d., he would have 7d. over. He therefore borrowed 6d. from his wife, and then found that he had just enough to give 6d. to each performer. How many carol singers were there?

For baffled readers, the answer is on page 167.

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She was so blindingly pretty . . .

O GOLD, O GIRL!

BY EDITH PARGETER

SHAKESPEARE," said the Purser moodily, over his second beer after the theatre, " everything's Shakespeare this year, of course. He did his share of pinching, though. That *my ducats and my daughter* stuff—there was another fellow did that better, I remember seeing the play once. *The Jew of Malta*, it was called. Can't remember the author's name. 'O gold, O girl! O beauty! O my bliss!' Seeing *The Merchant* tonight made me think of it again. And of a real-life case I once knew— Only she wasn't his daughter. Not that one . . .

I was a raw junior then, under old McLean on the *Aurea*, oh, ten years ago it would be. I dream about it sometimes, but not so often now. We were sailing from Liverpool for Bombay, my third trip, and this couple came aboard right in the rush before we sailed, and still you couldn't miss seeing them.

It was this girl. She was so blindingly pretty, for one thing; corn-gold hair, smoky eyes. And then, so touchingly pregnant. You know, these loose smocks, and then the very slender arms on the ponderous body. And the careful, faintly clumsy gait, balancing the weight. She went slowly on the companionways, and held on fast to the rail. You could feel every male in sight holding himself back from rushing to help her. Even the stewardess on their cabin was drooling. About six months gone, she reckoned, by her walk, and probably a boy. He'd be born in India. They were booked through to Bombay, probably going out to some expert advisory job. And she was a solid Scotswoman, this stewardess! I'm telling you, this girl could fetch 'em out of the trees!

The husband, he was older, probably forty to the girl's twenty-two or so, but he had something too. The women got their heads

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together over him before we were an hour out. Big good-looking fellow, dark and quiet and experienced-looking, hovering round his missus with such solicitude all the other wives on board turned green with envy. A reformed rake, they had him down for. Don Juan after he met the one girl. Try and get him away from her! Plenty of them did try before we neared Bombay—he was attractive too, seemingly. But no; as far as he was concerned there was no woman aboard but his wife. He hung over her with that broody look, every day of the seventeen.

Two days out we had a boat drill. We always did, though we never expected more than half of 'em to show up, not at that time of year, with the Irish Sea acting the way it so often does act. I was the officer on their boat, and I took care to show up near their cabin when the first siren sounded. He wasn't there. He'd gone to get her some library books. I had the pleasure of helping her on with her lifejacket. Like most women, she hadn't a clue how to put the thing on, instructions or no instructions.

She didn't seem so big, under that loose tunic of hers. Just a bit of a thing she must have been, normal times, I thought. And the way she thanked me, I'd have jumped overboard for her. Yes, she felt fine; yes, she'd go up on deck and report properly, like the others. And she did, too. Like a kid playing a game, the gayest person around.

Her husband soon came on the run, wild to snatch her away from the rest of us and look after her himself. There wasn't a man who didn't grudge him his rights.

Like that, all the way. She sat with her feet up, and knitted; but not always. At the sports she insisted on entering the egg-and-spoon race, and partnering her husband at shuffleboard. And at our filmshows they held hands in a quiet corner. The women reckoned they hadn't been married all that long, and he hadn't got over the happy shock of getting her, and couldn't quite believe in his luck.

We dropped about half our passengers off at Karachi, and made across for Bombay a bit subdued and quiet, as usual. And that night, round about midnight, the fire broke out.

There was a ball going on at the time—we usually staged something gay to cushion the partings. So we never did find out how it started. All I know is, suddenly there were alarm sirens below decks, and unaccountably none up in the saloons and bars, and the music went on, and up on the boatdeck there were still people in the pool long after there was near panic below. Communications went west because the whole loudspeaker system collapsed. And before you could say knife there was smoke

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everywhere; and in ten minutes more—chaos. Nobody could give orders beyond the reach of his own voice. And once people got frightened, the range of a voice wasn't much.

It wasn't a panic. They were a pretty decent lot. They'd have been all right if there'd been any way of telling 'em all just what to do. But there wasn't, except in small groups, and there weren't enough of us to go round the groups. And sometimes confusion and bewilderment can produce just the same results as panic. The best of 'em—the ones who are game and try to do something, do the wrong things for want of instructions. And the others get in their way and ours. What can you do? Thank God, it was dead calm, and two or three ships had got our calls, and were moving in to pick up the pieces.

It had to come to that. The fire spread like mad, and she began to list. We shoved everybody up on deck, got 'em into their lifejackets, and started getting the boats lowered. The din was something I'll never forget. Nobody was screaming, but everybody was shouting. Probably half the shouts made good sense, only no one was listening. They were all solos.

I was clawing my way along B Deck in the smoke, opening cabin doors and fielding the stragglers, with one of the women in one arm, and a Goanese steward towing two more behind me. I shoved open the door of 56, and there was our golden girl, clinging to her husband; her eyes like big grey lakes of stupefied terror. They were fumbling her lifejacket awkwardly between them. His lay on the lower berth.

I bellowed at him furiously to get the thing on her, quick, and grabbed hold of her with my free hand as soon as he'd bundled her into it. She toiled up the companionways after me, panting, her gait as laboured and painful as an old woman's. I even had time to bleed a little, inwardly, at the thought of hustling her—but man, we were in a hurry. The *Aurea* was lurching under us, shuddering on the dead calm sea; she wasn't going to last all that much longer.

I got them up to their boat, into that pandemonium on deck. There was a westbound tanker standing off by then, with boats out for us, searchlights quivering along the black water. And then the deck heeled under us and started to stand erect, sliding us down towards the rail. The women screamed and clung to whatever was nearest.

I thought we were going, so did we all, but she partly righted herself again. Then our boat slid down by the stern, and jammed, and I knew we were never going to launch that one. Some of the

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others were safely away already, standing well off and waiting to salvage what they could when we foundered.

Other boats were moving in from the tanker off in the dark there. One had come close, and was hailing us. I bellowed back at them, and they nosed in nearer. I grabbed hold of the golden girl. Two lives— You know how it is!

Her husband yelled at me like a fury, and held on to her like grim death, screaming hoarsely something I couldn't even distinguish in the general hell. I could understand it, but there wasn't time for convincing anybody of anything. I hooked my palm under his chin and shoved him off hard, and his grip of her broke. I picked her up in my arms and swung her over the rail, and dropped her gently and carefully into what I knew was the safest place for her—into the sea a few yards from the bows of the hovering boat. The officer I'd hailed was already leaning over to reach for her.

Then two things happened that I still dream about even now . . . Her husband let out a shriek like a damned soul—a sound I'll never forget, and tore his way screaming to the rail, and hurled himself over it. And the girl, the golden girl—my God, she hit the water and she sank like a stone.

Her face was turned up, mute, staring at me with those lost, terrified eyes, right to the second when the water closed over it. Like a stone! Hardly a splash. She vanished, and didn't reappear.

I was a whole minute grasping it. Can you imagine that? Then I dived after her, down and down, hunting for her time after time after time, until they hauled me aboard the boat by force. I didn't find her. But once, I think, I glimpsed him, deep down there, plunging as I was plunging. I seem to remember a face with hair torn erect, frantic eyes, mouth howling soundlessly. Her name? It would be nice to think I only imagined it. Better still to forget it. I can't do either.

There was nothing left of him either, by that time, except his lifejacket, washing about aimlessly, where he'd torn it off and discarded it to dive for her. We never should have found either of them, if the vortex, as the *Aurea* finally went under, hadn't churned up everything from the depths and flung it to the rim of the area. The tanker still had boats out, and one of them fielded the girl's body, by a sheer fluke, as it showed for an instant before plunging again. We never did find him. All things considered, it's just as well . . .

It was finding her, and what we found on her, that brought Interpol into the story.

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She wasn't his wife, of course. She was a photographer's model and small-part actress he'd picked up at some club. She wasn't pregnant either. Only the way he felt about her, I'll swear, was no fake. He'd never used her before. All his previous cargoes had been smuggled in by air, with other carriers, and this last one was to have been an easy stake—a pleasure cruise with a nice pay-off at the end of it. It was very profitable business. I think they weren't coming back.

All the stuff she'd brought aboard in the padded bodice under her maternity smock, they'd hidden—once the initial boat drill was safely over—in that lifejacket of hers. A daft place? Well, look, I'll tell you something. Nobody ever believes they're going to need those damn' lifejackets in earnest—nobody. It wasn't so daft a place. It had been vetted once, and nobody was likely to interfere with it again. And she could make herself comfortable until she had to resume the burden at Bombay, and carry it tenderly ashore and through the Customs. Only they left the job of transferring it again until the last night, and the fire caught them unprepared.

Of course, he could have worn the thing himself and given her the other. Maybe he would have, if I hadn't barged in on them and forced his hand. Or maybe he wouldn't. She was, after all, a professional doing a job for him. Once in the boat she'd have been safe enough. And whatever followed, it was she, with her disarming beauty and her interesting condition, who would have had the special VIP treatment, and the best chance of retrieving their stake, and getting it safely into India.

I still wonder which he was really diving for, the girl, or the thirty pounds weight of thin bar gold that drowned her.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (DECEMBER ISSUE)

Across. 1, *Card-sharper*. 9, *Extra*. 10, *Eric*. 11, *Strata*. 12, *Liege*. 14, *Anarchism*. 16, *Aunt*. 17, *Scoop*. 19, *Often*. 22, *Orchid*. 23, *Ordeal*. 24, *Abaft*. 26, *Outer*. 28, *Puma*. 29, *Estranges*. 31, *Bluff*. 34, *Ocelot*. 35, *Neat*. 36, *Elder*. 37, *Money to burn*.

Down. 2, *Airs*. 3, *Decant*. 4, *Attic*. 5, *Praline*. 6, *Realms*. 7, *Stye*. 8, *Caterpillar*. 13, *Baron of beef*. 14, *Anicut*. 15, *Rhoda*. 18, *Obelus*. 20, *Tea*. 21, *Not in*. 25, *Bittern*. 27, *Reform*. 28, *Pen-nib*. 30, *Agony*. 32, *Urdu*. 33, *Fair*.

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It seemed absurd that we couldn't just walk out

THE BATTLE OF MUSSOLINI

BY GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

TIME had dealt fairly kindly with both of them, thickening the loose limbs once burnt and slendered by desert sun but leaving them their fine-drawn regard for duty and each other. War was still a vividly remembered way of life, though now being recorded by historians too young to have experienced it. They had the facts right, Tarmer said, but not the day-to-day feel of them.

The old friend with whom he was lunching—and had once lunched, if you could call it that, every day for two oppressive years—received this remark with one of his personal silences as if a fuse were slowly burning down into sensitivity.

"A chap in the paper," Bill Avory exploded at last, "was actually complaining that nobody ever entertained the public with a good story of an escape from an Italian prisoner-of-war camp."

"There were mass escapes when Italy packed up. A lot of fellows got clear away as we did."

"Before that, he meant. He said an officer's duty to escape had been less obvious in the casual climate of Italy than when subjected to the melancholy emptiness of German discipline."

The fact that Avory exactly remembered the precious and exasperating phrase proved that it cut, and that he found truth enough in the slander to spoil the image which two prosperous, middle-aged citizens conceived of their adventurous youth.

"I wonder if it wasn't far harder to escape in Italy," Tarmer suggested.

Avory insisted that it couldn't have been. There was no denying that the climate had been casual—so casual that a monk had been readily allowed to come into the camp for cocoa, and there had been goats in the outer perimeter.

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" It seems absurd that we couldn't just walk out," he said.

It did, in retrospect. Even Tarmer, whose conscience was far tougher than his friend's, felt a shade of guilt as he remembered the failure of tunnels, of impersonations, of attempts to stow away in ration carts. On the face of it, both of them were examples of the lack of enterprise which that young critic of war on paper had mentioned. Prisoners in Germany did seem to have been more ruthlessly determined.

But Italians had more imagination than Germans and were less bound by routine. It had been impossible to calculate in advance where any of the guards would be idling at any given time. If you laid plans to take advantage of the usual genial but quite effective chaos, you would hit a night when discipline was of cold, Teutonic standard; and if you timed exactly . . .

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"We could never time exactly," he reminded Avory. "We had to work out an average."

And even when they had averaged for week after week the guard changes, the movements of the Ditch Patrol, the interludes when illicit litres of wine were hoisted up by string to the five Watch Towers, they would find all their ingenious calculations dislocated because Colonel Colonna's wife was giving a party and in need of orderlies.

The Colonel—that flamboyant old chevalier of the Mediterranean who commanded the camp—undoubtedly would have liked to invite all his prisoners, accepting their parole in the politest manner of the eighteenth century. He deplored the military honour of the twentieth which compelled them to make nuisances of themselves to him and his Government.

"Your journalist sounds like that pompous ass, Fantle," Tarmer protested. "He always made escape sound easy, too."

Wing-Commander Fantle had been the Senior British Officer. He took his responsibilities so seriously that he had no time for manners. Nothing ever prevented him from saying what he chose to his fellow prisoners, but to Colonel Colonna he could only speak through an interpreter. He had therefore chosen Captain Tarmer to be his adjutant in preference to more submissive officers. Tarmer could translate his imperial protests into fluent Italian.

Fantle's sole concern with Europe had been to drop explosives on it—useful enough at the time, but leading to contempt for the languages spoken underneath. Thus it was easy to maintain a cordial atmosphere in spite of him.

When the Senior British Officer started off a protest with:

Tell that dam' organ-grinder . . .

Tarmer had been able to insert some compliments and a proper respect for rank. Translating the other way round—for the Commandant's interpreter spoke Italian-American which Fantle wilfully pretended he could not understand—it delighted him to make Colonna sound terse, cool and British.

When either of them accused him of making sentences too long or too short, he sold the myth that it was impossible to be polite in English or precise in Italian. Since eyes could express themselves without any interpreter he had no hope of persuading the Commandant and the Senior British Officer to like each other, but at least he ensured as much tolerance as could be expected from two different animals separated by the bars of the cage.

"It may have been my fault that we couldn't work up enough resentment," Tarmer said.

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"You couldn't help it! In a place like Medina Fort one was forced to have some military manners."

It was a little gem of seventeenth century fortification—nothing but a museum piece until it occurred to some imaginative Fascist official that a stronghold designed to keep the enemy out would be equally effective to keep him in.

The heart of the fortress where the prisoners were confined—housed partly in huts, partly in the renovated and whitewashed quarters of old blue-and-gold artillerymen—was a blunt-angled pentagon measuring about three hundred yards across. Formally delimiting this area was an inner perimeter of low wire. A prisoner who stepped over or vaulted the wire could officially be shot at. He never was. The Italians, with their sound grasp of essentials, realised that the momentary infringement was not worth the trouble of cleaning a rifle.

They could afford to be generous. Beyond this inner perimeter a stone glacis sloped down to the broad, green ditch around the fort. The far bank of the ditch was a thirty-foot sheer wall, topped by a further fifteen feet of heavy wire fence. The prisoners had at last been forced to admit that the smooth, well-fitted ashlars of the wall were unclimbable.

"Anything is climbable," said Bill Avory, still smarting from the accusation made by his older self against his younger self.

"But not in a hurry," Tarmer replied . . .

He remembered the ropes, pitons and ladders which they had ingeniously made. Time to use them, however, could not be fabricated. The whole circuit was commanded by five Watch Towers, one near each angle. At night the great ditch was floodlit from the towers. An escaping prisoner had as much chance as an actor on a stage of avoiding interested almost friendly—observation.

Bill Avory had been convinced that the only way to get out was by the gate, nonchalantly strolling past the guards at the barrier, over the seventeenth century bridge and across the barrack square of the garrison. He was very nearly successful, disguised as the monk who came in for cocoa; but the Italians had guessed somebody would try that one. They were so delighted to have foreseen every detail of Lieutenant Avory's plan that they returned him to the cage in fairly comradely fashion and with snatches of song. Colonel Colonna was bound to punish, but saw to it that bread-and-water and solitary confinement meant wine-and-rolls and a card party in the afternoon. Cavalry panache appealed to him. He was fascinated by the cherry

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trousers of the 11th Hussars which Bill still wore, even under his home-made cassock.

As soon as three goats were turned loose in the fort ditch, all plans for escape immediately took this new factor into consideration. During the day the animals were free to browse where they pleased; at night they were penned under the bridge. Inevitably they became pets. The convention which prohibited the crossing of the inner wire was being continually violated.

Colonel Colonna, very bothered lest his orders to shoot might possibly be obeyed, protested politely to the Senior British Officer. Fantle retorted that the wire ought to be put in reasonable repair, thus preventing officers from crossing it to feed the goats or to retrieve articles of clothing which the goats were eating. To this the Commandant replied that it was unsoldierly to use the wire as a washing-line.

Tarmer thought so too. He was a Guards officer, and his training occasionally overwhelmed him. He therefore translated the bit about the washing-line correctly. The Senior British Officer snorted that the Commandant wouldn't know a soldier if he saw one. Tarmer, pulling himself together, interpreted this as a mere harmless comment that gentlemen in captivity could not be expected to keep up the high sartorial standard of Italian officers. Colonel Colonna at once sympathised, shook hands all round and allowed a manly tear of pity to sparkle for a moment in his eye.

Over-petting was thereupon reduced; but the habits, characters and potentialities of the three nanny-goats were recorded by the escaping clubs with the devotion of psychoanalysts. The camp had time for patience, and one could never say that any scientific study was wholly useless.

The goats were of marked individuality. Each reflected its upbringing—or at least seemed to do so when scrutinised by rampant imaginations. Tecla belonged to the Commandant's wife; and was black, supercilious and inclined to bleat at the harsh necessities of her life. Lucia was a gentle, modest job in brown and white, owned by a neighbouring priory. Beatrice, who belonged to the camp doctor, was pure white but a liberal; she disliked the Church and the Military.

Fra Giuseppe—the monk who came in for cocoa—used to milk all three. Indeed it was almost certainly he who had conceived the economical thought of pasturing the goats in the green ditch. When attending to Lucia and Tecla he always looked round to see that Beatrice was fully occupied. Her horns were slightly deformed; when her head was lowered, they pointed

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forwards. She tended to be attracted by any bent backside clothed in black, whether cassock or breeches.

"Fantle used to swear that the anti-Fascists were always ready to help us," Avory said.

"Like hell they were! We never saw an anti-Fascist except the doctor."

A genial and comforting soul! But it would have been absurd to ask him for help in an escape. He would have replied at once, with sound commonsense, that they were much better off where they were than wandering round the countryside.

"Even Mussolini wasn't anti-Fascist," Tarmer went on. "He was just pro-British."

So far as one could judge the political opinions of a goat, that was the literal truth Mussolini's pro-British sympathies were obvious from the day he was introduced, black, weighty and gambolling with anticipation, into the fort ditch for the sake of roast kid and the future of the milk supply.

The prisoners at once christened him Mussolini, and the name stuck. Their guards, watching with approval the potency and cavortings of the animal, failed to see any grave insult to their Head of State. Disrespect there might be, but they themselves were far from reverent—though showing more subtlety than could be expected of the enemy.

"Just imagine the row in a German camp if everybody had started to call a billy-goat Hitler!" Avory exclaimed.

"There you are, you see! Germans go blind with anger—which must have been a great help when one wanted to get away from them. Your man who made that crack about the casual climate of Italy didn't know that it made escape harder, not easier."

Mussolini adored the prisoners—possibly because he took the cheering of the enemy as more of a compliment than the sardonic encouragement of unfrustrated guards. He recognised affection in the voices, and looked to the British for approval of his revolting preliminaries, his tender approach and his decisive attack. During the days of Mussolini's attention to Lucia, Tecla and Beatrice the camp's morale had been high and joyous. There was something fresh to talk about, something to exaggerate and a new and promising source of noise.

Noise in the ditch—plenty of it and at the right place—was essential to the escaping scheme registered in the names of Avory and Tarmer. The plan was born from a tunnel dug practically singlehanded by a vast Marine, who had been picked up by an Italian destroyer while optimistically trying to swim from Kithira

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to Crete. His tunnel ended, as they all knew it would, where the massive masonry of the fort met bedrock. But there or thereabouts he dug up the remains of a crossbow.

This inspired Avory to a flight of imagination which Tarmer carried into the world of reality by finding a mechanic to work on it.

"I wonder what happened to Tommy Robins," Avory said. "He was as good on materials as you are on men. Getting the feel of them, I mean."

Pilot-Officer Robins had manufactured from old car springs two crossbows of formidable power. Tested for silence, weight of projectile and range, they were accepted by the committee of four as fully developed secret devices and stored for use when the perfect occasion arose.

The target was the cable which sagged from post to post above the high wire fence of the outer perimeter. A rocket-shaped grapnel, with four deep hooks at one end and a rope at the other, was to be shot like a whaling harpoon across the ditch and over the cable. A hearty pull on the rope should then either break the cable or drag it off the insulators. Immediately after the Watch Towers had been plunged in darkness a second grapnel would be fired over the fence. The hooks were bound to catch somewhere at the top of the wire, and the party would then climb wall and fence by means of the hanging rope.

So far, so good—always assuming that the nearest Watch Tower did not notice the first projectile and its rope soaring through the air. But if the four partners were to be able to put a reasonable distance between themselves and Medina Fort by morning, there must be no suspicion that any escape had taken place. The camp, therefore, had to appear quite silent and peaceful in the accidental darkness, and there had to be a simple explanation of the scrapes and scufflings as the party swarmed up the rope.

That was where the goats came in; the most promising way of creating a diversion was to let them out of their pen. But it was far from foolproof. A sleepy Beatrice could not be absolutely trusted to put in a personal attack on the patrol; and those docile creatures, Lucia and Tecla, were certain to do nothing but browse.

The constant activity of Mussolini, however, added new and exciting chances of success. A couple of days after the patriarch's arrival, Avory called a committee meeting in one of the old galleries beneath their quarters.

"If we could set Mussolini free in the ditch," he had said,

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" and if he got tangled up in a coil of wire or some tin cans or something in the dark, the Ditch Patrol wouldn't look for any other explanation of noises."

" He might hurt himself," the Marine objected.

" He might," Tarmer agreed. " And if he does I will ask the Senior British Officer to send some flowers. But the Geneva Convention says nothing about damage to goats."

Tarmer remembered speaking with some bitterness. That very morning Wing-Commander Fantle had declared that Colonel Colonna, his half battalion of decrepit ice cream merchants and the four half-witted apes perched up in each Watch Tower were quite incapable of keeping an enterprising rabbit in a hutch. Meticulous planning could get a man out of anywhere. Look, he said, at all the empty-headed crooks who escaped from Dartmoor!

That meticulous planning! God, they had spent hours and months of hours at it! But Mussolini—reminding them forcibly of the outside world and their own Lucias and Teclas—was an inspiration to still further planning. How to let the goats loose? Tarmer had a vision of finding a use, at long last, for the damned monk who swilled their cocoa. The full details could wait. For the moment it was enough to ask Tommy Robins to make a twenty-foot pole smoothly tapering—so that it would not catch on obstructions when poked or withdrawn—to a short, sharp spike at the end.

" Not for Mussolini? " the Marine had implored him.

" For Beatrice—through the casemate."

Out of the subterranean galleries opened casemates which had once held the guns to sweep attackers off the glacis. The mouths were blocked by iron bars and coils of wire, frequently checked by the Ditch Patrol. Even so, prisoners had crawled through them—but only into the glare of the lights and immediate arrest.

One casemate, close to the bridge, was just above the pen of the three nanny-goats. It was quite possible to spoil Beatrice's sleep and temper by working a pole through the entanglement and poking. Yet only the combination of Mussolini and Beatrice could really be trusted to raise hell. The committee pointed out to Tarmer that Mussolini was shut up out of reach in a pen of his own.

" Even if we talk Fra Giuseppe into letting the nanny-goats out," Bill Avory objected, " he won't let Mussolini out too. The girls have to rest some time."

That was true enough.

It looked as if Mussolini would have to be kidnapped or invited

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into the camp, and then concealed until the moment came to make use of him.

No contact with Fra Giuseppe was possible on the following day. The escape committee was despondent, for Mussolini, having generously fulfilled the purpose of his visit, might at any moment be driven back to his home. Preparations, however, were complete. The crossbows could go into action at ten minutes' notice.

On the next evening Fra Giuseppe was seen in the ditch, all pastoral in the last of the twilight, while the four goats walked peaceably in front of him to their respective pens. Tarmer shouted to him that parcels had arrived with a fresh supply of cocoa. He suggested, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, that Mussolini ought to come too, to say good-bye to the boys.

"But he smells!" the monk had protested.

"So do we! Be a sport, Fra Giuseppe!"

He was. Over the bridge, past the laughing guards at the barrier, trotting happily and poisoning the air for fifty yards around him, came Mussolini followed by Fra Giuseppe. The goat sat down with his four legs curled under him: a black, contented bulk upon the cool paving of the fort. Somebody served him the scrapings of the evening's spaghetti; someone else wreathed his horns with paper flowers left over from such Christmas celebrations as the camp had had. He looked straight from hell, but he was in heaven. Mussolini brimmed over with affection for human kind, and yet was continually deprived of the petting he adored owing to his penetrating odour. He shared to the full the emotions of those girls in the advertisements whom men won't dance with.

As soon as Fra Giuseppe had become gently inebriated by the smell of cocoa, Tarmer asked him why his Lucia had been limping and hoped that she had not cut herself on the wire of the inner perimeter while licking salt from outstretched hands. The monk had noticed no limp—reasonably enough since she hadn't got one—but promised to have a look at her before he went home to his priory. Tarmer's eloquent Italian rippled with anxiety for Lucia. Meanwhile the cocoa failed to appear. Fra Giuseppe at last realised that he was being subjected to gentle, almost ecclesiastical blackmail, unspoken and perhaps not even deliberate. He agreed to go down to the ditch and report back immediately on Lucia's condition.

As soon as the monk had strolled off towards the barrier and the bridge, leaving the delighted Mussolini where he was, Avory

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raced to the casemate and started to arouse Beatrice's brisk temper. The twenty-foot pole was already through the casemate, its point free and commanding the little pen. The crossbows were set up and loaded.

. . . "Cocoa," Tarmer murmured, the imagined scent of it almost as vivid as the real scent twenty years earlier.

"*Now*?" Avory asked in surprise, sharing step by step the train of thought except for that sudden nasal memory.

"Wouldn't coffee and a brandy be better?"

Yes. Yes, they would indeed. One couldn't recover the taste of cocoa brewed in a prisoner-of-war camp. It was as hopeless as to try to re-enter the paradise which brown sugar had been at the age of five.

Bill Avory beckoned to the waiter, and chuckled . . .

"All I saw at my end of the pole," he said, "was Fra Giuseppe unlocking the door of the goat pen. And then Beatrice charged."

The monk shot out into the floodlit ditch with the doctor's anti-clerical goat a yard behind him. It looked as if his initial burst of speed might carry him clear out of the operational area; but, fortunately for the plan, Beatrice caught him.

Her butt went home just above the right knee. The desperate monk, screaming for help, swerved, spread his cassock like a bullfighter and received the next charge in the cloth. Beatrice's horns bruised painfully but were not sharp enough to penetrate loose clothing; cloth stretched tight, however, was another matter. The monk's excellent technique resulted in a heaving tangle of black and white.

When it became possible for the eye to separate one from the other, Beatrice was dressed in the lower half of the cassock and Fra Giuseppe was embracing her hind legs in a frantic attempt to prevent her cantering away with the rest of it.

"It was more than we dared hope for," said Tarmer. "We could hear the sentries cheering and laughing in the towers."

The monk was between Towers One and Two, and it was certain that the guards were looking at nothing else. The Bridge Tower to the west and Tower Three to the east were unsighted by the angles of the pentagon. Tommy Robins fired the grapnel over the cable. The Marine heaved on the rope. After a moment of resistance the grapnel returned to hand, flying back into the camp on a lower and more violent trajectory than the curve of its outward journey.

The darkness shocked by its sudden totality. Not only were the floodlights extinguished but all the camp lights as well.

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There was an instant of astonished silence on the part of both guards and prisoners, through which echoed the exclamations of Fra Giuseppe, now rendered hysterical by the kicks of Beatrice and his incoherent gratitude to the saint whose miracle or the soldier whose Christian charity had put out the lights.

The second grapnel sailed over the ditch and caught. With the interested assistance of Mussolini, escape was now nearly certain.

Tarmer stood by the affectionate head, Avory at the stern. They lifted him over the inner perimeter wire and dropped him on to the glacis between the Bridge Tower and Tower One. He had an old leather shoe tied to his tail by a yard of cord. Its mysterious leapings and scufflings ought to be enough to delay and deceive the Ditch Patrol for the half minute required to climb wall and wire.

Tarmer and Avory raced back from the disposal of Mussolini to find Robins and the Marine still testing the rope. Resistance was soft and unreliable. The grapnel seemed to be caught in a weak loop of wire which it was pulling out along the top of the fence; it felt as if it could not be trusted to support bodies climbing furiously up the rope against time.

It stuck firmly on something hard, evidently the top of a post. But a last jerk was indecisive, though nothing appeared to break or yield. Tarmer and Avory added their weight to the rope and had to take a step backwards as it gave. In the darkness it was impossible to see what was happening; there was nothing for it but to keep on pulling in a desperate attempt to recover the grapnel and try again. Another yard or two of rope came in, and its angle was not so steep. The sensation was baffling. They felt as if they were the winning team in an obstinate tug-of-war. Then thirty yards of that formidable outer perimeter fence fell over into the ditch, forming an impenetrable trampoline suspended from the leaning posts at each end of the wreckage.

There was another terrifying moment of silence, which ended in the almost musical twanging and tearing of wire as the grapnel was worked loose by brute force and recovered.

The guards on Number Two Tower turned their attention from the bleating of Beatrice and the monk, and challenged. They then opened fire with rifles on the ditch and the collapsed fence. Since their eyes were still unused to the blank darkness, they found it hard to judge the correct angle of depression. Some of the shots strayed across the protruding angle of the camp and sang past the ears of the defenders of Tower Three.

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"I've never understood Three Tower," Avory said.

"They swore afterwards that they thought parachutists were trying to rescue us. But I know what happened. They had a light machine-gun which they'd never had a chance to use, and they weren't going to be left out of whatever excitement there was."

Three Tower put down a curtain of fire on the ditch and at least hit the glacis. Ricochets from that smooth stone slope howled across the camp—some of them on a trajectory low enough to tear splinters off the wooden roof of Number Two Tower.

On the still peaceful western side of the camp Mussolini behaved as if he had been in on the plan since the beginning. Loyal and single-minded, he charged down to the quietly grazing Tecla and tried to console her loneliness. Tecla at any time was a dignified goat, her expression always making it clear that Mussolini's were unwelcome attentions to which it was her duty to submit; so now, approached by an importunate lover at, for goats, an unreasonable hour, she fled for her pen under the Bridge Tower.

The Ditch Patrol, which had been idling its way from Number Four to the Bridge Tower, clearly decided that the eastern side of the camp was well covered by fire from Number Two and Three, and was also extremely unhealthy. It therefore cautiously continued its round until alerted by the bouncings of Mussolini and his shoe. It didn't stop to investigate at all. It took such cover as there was and plastered the ditch with automatic fire. Most of it was high. The guards on the Bridge Tower, nervously searching the impenetrable darkness for the unknown enemy which had attacked Towers Two and Three, briskly engaged the Ditch Patrol.

By now Mussolini was in safety with Tecla under the bridge. But Tecla must have made the most of the difficulties and protested that the pen was not nearly large enough for Mussolini too. Her excuse was acceptable. He was always a free and easy goat who liked plenty of space and publicity. He therefore trotted off beyond the bridge on the scent of Lucia. She had halfheartedly followed her master, the monk, and was now browsing close to Number One Tower.

Number One hitherto deprived of any opportunity for heroics, at once opened fire on the mysterious noises. Since the ditch ran straight between Number One and the Bridge Tower, without any protruding angle, the gentle slope of the glacis was murderous, and the stuff came off it with the accuracy of tennis balls. The terrified Lucia joined Tecla under the bridge. The guards

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up in the Bridge Tower, attacked from both sides and hearing beneath them the sinister rattlings and scrapings of the final bloody assault, surrendered to Mussolini . . .

" I suppose it was funny," Avory said.

" It was damned dangerous. Nobody felt like laughing till Fantle appeared."

Dodging from cover to cover the Senior British Officer had joined the prostrate and fascinated group just as the crossbows had been dismantled and concealed. He demanded a situation report from his adjutant.

Tarmer replied that the goats had got out, that the guards had mistaken them for escaping prisoners and that in the general confusion part of the fence between Towers Two and Three had fallen into the ditch.

" Then what the hell are you still doing here? "

" Personally, sir," Avory had said, " I am waiting for the lights to go on so that I can finish my book."

Hardly fair, perhaps! But the disappointment was bitter. As for a mass break-out in the confusion, it couldn't be launched into an unseen tangle of wire through which nothing but artillery could blast a path.

The firing and the distracted cries of Mama mia! died away. Searchlights and the headlamps of trucks illumined the ditch, revealing not a single corpse, not even of a goat. All was painfully quiet except between Towers One and Two where the Ditch Patrol, having clothed Fra Giuseppe in a blanket, was fearlessly meeting the challenge of Beatrice.

When the break in the power line had been repaired, Colonel Colonna at the head of a full company marched into the camp and paraded his innocent charges. To his astonishment not one was missing.

It was then that resentment should have been shown, that the prisoners should have jeered at their captors and established such a moral ascendancy that a battalion would have to be telegraphed for to control them. But only four of them knew what had really happened.

The rest were gasping between laughter and bewilderment, and inclined to hope that a revolution had broken out in Italy.

As soon as the parade had been dismissed and only the senior officers remained, the Commandant observed in a tone of mild distaste rather than rebuke, " I am informed that some joke was played upon Muss . . . upon the he-goat."

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"We all sincerely hope he came to no harm, sir," Tarmer answered.

"Thank you. Apart from a sprained tail he is unhurt. May I ask you, gentlemen, to accept the apologies of myself and my command for disturbing your evening?"

"Tell him that it was a disgraceful, cowardly episode," Fantle stormed, "and that we don't give a damn for his apologies!"

Tarmer's conscience stung him a little as he remembered how he had translated that one. But Colonna was no German Commandant bristling with suspicion, fury and punishments. In spite of what he must be feeling, he still cultivated a friendly atmosphere full of human acceptance of the tasteless tricks of young officers and the liability of troops to panic in the dark.

"The Senior British Officer assures you, sir," Tarmer had said, putting an extra formality into his voice so that the change of tone would not be too obvious, "that between gentlemen of good will all apologies are unnecessary."

No, he had not been wrong. Unmilitary, perhaps. But if there was anything whatever to be said in favour of war Colonna represented its spirit better than Fantle. He said as much to Avory.

"Just what that damned journalist meant by the casual climate of Italy!" Avory replied.

"But it cuts both ways. In any German camp the posts would have been set in concrete with decent efficiency. And then all four of us would have got clear away."

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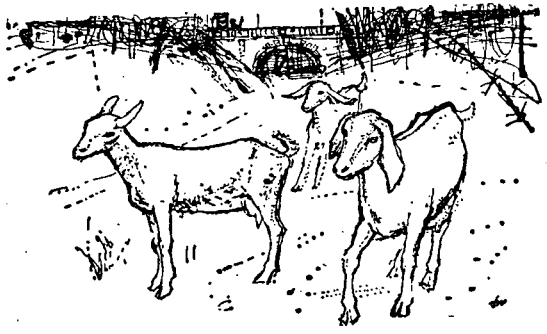

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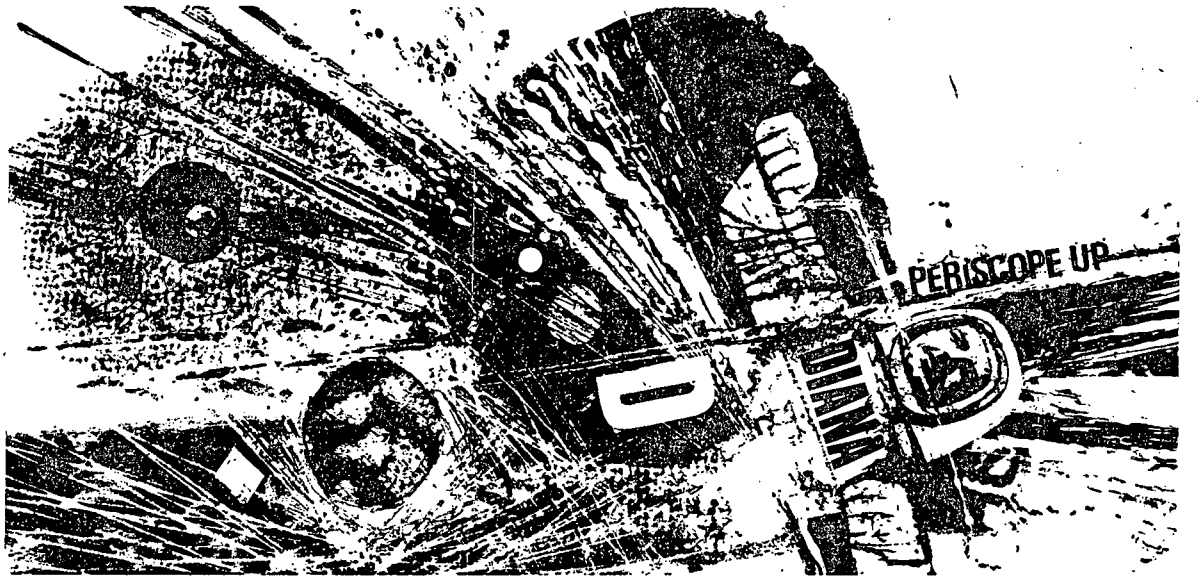

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BY ARTHUR C. CLARKE

THE enormous disc of sail strained at its rigging, already filled with the wind that blew between the worlds. In three minutes the race would begin, yet now John Merton felt more relaxed, more at peace, than at any time for the past year. Whatever happened when the Commodore gave the starting signal, whether *Diana* carried him to victory or defeat, he had achieved his ambition. After a lifetime spent in designing ships for others, now he would sail his own.

"T minus two minutes," said the cabin radio. "Please confirm your readiness."

One by one, the other skippers answered. Merton recognised all the voices—some tense, some calm—for they were the voices of his friends and rivals. On the four inhabited worlds, there were scarcely twenty men who could sail a sun-yacht; and they were all here, on the starting-line or aboard the escort vessels, orbiting twenty-two thousand miles above the equator.

"Number One, *Gossamer*—ready to go."

"Number Two, *Santa Maria*—all O.K."

"Number Three, *Sunbeam*—O.K."

"Number Four, *Woomera*—all systems go."

Merton smiled at that last echo from the early, primitive days of astronautics. But it had become part of the tradition of space; and there were times when a man needed to evoke the shades of those who had gone before him to the stars.

"Number Five, *Lebedev*—we're ready."

"Number Six, *Arachne*—O.K."

Now it was his turn, at the end of the line; strange to think that the words he was speaking in this tiny cabin were being heard by at least five billion people.

"Number Seven, *Diana*—ready to start."

"One through Seven acknowledged," answered that impersonal voice from the judge's launch. "Now T minus one minute."

Merton scarcely heard it; for the last time, he was checking the tension in the rigging. The needles of all the dynamometers were steady; the immense sail was taut, its mirror surface sparkling and glittering gloriously in the sun.

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To Merton, floating weightless at the periscope, it seemed to fill the sky. As well it might—for out there were fifty million square feet of sail, linked to his capsule by almost a hundred miles of rigging. All the canvas of all the tea-clippers that had once raced like clouds across the China seas, sewn into one gigantic sheet, could not match the single sail that *Diana* had spread beneath the sun. Yet it was little more substantial than a soap-bubble; that two square miles of aluminised plastic was only a few millionths of an inch thick.

"T minus ten seconds. All recording cameras *on.*"

Something so huge, yet so frail, was hard for the mind to grasp. And it was harder still to realise that this fragile mirror could tow him free of Earth, merely by the power of the sunlight it would trap.

". . . Five, Four, Three, Two, One, *cut!*"

Seven knife-blades sliced through the seven thin lines tethering the yachts to the motherships that had assembled and serviced them.

Until this moment, all had been circling Earth together in a rigidly held formation, but now the yachts would begin to disperse, like dandelion seeds drifting before the breeze. And the winner would be the one that first drifted past the Moon.

Aboard *Diana*, nothing seemed to be happening. But Merton knew better; though his body could feel no thrust, the instrument board told him that he was now accelerating at almost one thousandth of a gravity. For a rocket, that figure would have been ludicrous—but this was the first time any solar yacht had ever attained it. *Diana's* design was sound; the vast sail was living up to his calculations. At this rate, two circuits of the Earth would build up his speed to escape velocity—and then he could head out for the Moon, with the full force of the Sun behind him.

The full force of the Sun. He smiled wryly, remembering all his attempts to explain solar sailing to those lecture audiences back on Earth. That had been the only way he could raise money, in those early days. He might be Chief Designer of Cosmodyne Corporation, with a whole string of successful spaceships to his credit, but his firm had not been exactly enthusiastic about his hobby.

"Hold your hands out to the Sun," he'd said. "What do you feel? Heat, of course. But there's pressure as well—though you've never noticed it, because it's so tiny. Over the area of your hands, it only comes to about a millionth of an ounce.

"But out in space, even a pressure as small as that can be

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important—for it's acting all the time, hour after hour, day after day. Unlike rocket fuel, it's free and unlimited. If we want to, we can use it; we can build sails to catch the radiation blowing from the Sun."

At that point, he would pull out a few square yards of sail material and toss it towards the audience. The silvery film would coil and twist like smoke, then drift slowly to the ceiling in the hot-air currents.

"You can see how light it is," he'd continue. "A square mile weighs only a ton, and can collect five pounds of radiation pressure. So it will start moving—and we can let it tow us along, if we attach rigging to it.

"Of course, its acceleration will be tiny—about a thousandth of a g. That doesn't seem much, but let's see what it means.

"It means that in the first second, we'll move about a fifth of an inch. I suppose a healthy snail could do better than that. But after a minute, we've covered sixty feet, and will be doing just over a mile an hour. That's not bad, for something driven by pure sunlight! After an hour, we're forty miles from our starting point, and will be moving at eighty miles an hour. Please remember that in space there's no friction, so once you start anything moving, it will keep going forever. You'll be surprised when I tell you what our thousandth-of-a-g sailing-boat will be doing at the end of a day's run. *Almost two thousand miles an hour!* If it starts from orbit—as it has to, of course—it can reach escape velocity in a couple of days. And all without burning a single drop of fuel!"

Well, he'd convinced them, and in the end he'd even convinced Cosmodyne. Over the last twenty years, a new sport had come into being. It had been called the sport of billionaires, and that was true—but it was beginning to pay for itself in terms of publicity and television coverage. The prestige of four continents and two worlds was riding on this race, and it had the biggest audience in history.

DIANA had made a good start; time to take a look at the opposition. Moving very gently. Though there were shock absorbers between the control capsule and the delicate rigging, he was determined to run no risks. Merton stationed himself at the periscope.

There they were, looking like strange silver flowers planted in the dark fields of space. The nearest, South America's *Santa Maria*, was only fifty miles away; it bore a resemblance

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to a boy's kite—but a kite more than a mile on its side. Farther away, the University of Astrograd's *Lebedev* looked like a Maltese cross; the sails that formed the four arms could apparently be tilted for steering purposes. In contrast, the Federation of Australasia's *Woomera* was a simple parachute, four miles in circumference. General Spacecraft's *Arachne*, as its name suggested, looked like a spider-web—and had been built on the same principles, by robot shuttles spiralling out from a central point. Eurospace Corporation's *Gossamer* was an identical design, on a slightly smaller scale. And the Republic of Mars' *Sunbeam* was a flat ring, with a half-mile-wide hole in the centre, spinning slowly so that centrifugal force gave it stiffness. That was an old idea, but no one had ever made it work. Merton was fairly sure that the colonials would be in trouble when they started to turn.

That would not be for another six hours, when the yachts had moved along the first quarter of their slow and stately twenty-four hour orbit. Here at the beginning of the race, they were all heading directly away from the Sun—running, as it were, before the solar wind. One had to make the most of this lap, before the boats swung round to the other side of Earth and then started to head back into the Sun.

Time for the first check, Merton told himself, while he had no navigational worries. With the periscope, he made a careful examination of the sail, concentrating on the points where the rigging was attached to it. The shroud-lines—narrow bands of unsilvered plastic film—would have been completely invisible had they not been coated with fluorescent paint. Now they were taut lines of coloured light, dwindling away for hundreds of yards towards that gigantic sail. Each had its own electric windlass, not much bigger than a game-fisherman's reel. The little windlasses were continually turning, playing lines in or out, as the autopilot kept the sail trimmed at the correct angle to the Sun.

The play of sunlight on the great flexible mirror was beautiful to watch. It was undulating in slow, stately oscillations, sending multiple images of the Sun marching across the heavens, until they faded away at the edges of the sail. Such leisurely vibrations were to be expected in this vast and flimsy structure; they were usually quite harmless, but Merton watched them carefully. Sometimes they could build up to the catastrophic undulations known as the wriggles, which could tear a sail to pieces.

When he was satisfied that everything was shipshape, he swept the periscope around the sky, rechecking the positions

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of his rivals. It was as he had hoped; the weeding-out process had begun, as the less efficient boats fell astern. But the real test would come when they passed into the shadow of Earth; then manœuvrability would count as much as speed.

It seemed a strange thing to do, now that the race had just started, but it might be a good idea to get some sleep. The two man crews on the other boats could take it in turns, but Merton had no one to relieve him. He must rely on his own physical resources—like that other solitary seaman Joshua Slocum, in his tiny *Spray*. The American skipper had sailed *Spray* single-handed round the world; he could never have dreamt that, two centuries later, a man would be sailing single-handed from Earth to Moon—inspired, at least partly, by his example.

Merton snapped the elastic bands of the cabin seat around his waist and legs, then placed the electrodes of the sleep-inducer on his forehead. He set the timer for three hours, and relaxed.

Very gently, hypnotically, the electronic pulses throbbed in the frontal lobes of his brain. Coloured spirals of light expanded beneath his closed eyelids, widening outwards to infinity. Then —nothing . . .

The brazen clamour of the alarm dragged him back from his dreamless sleep. He was instantly awake, his eyes scanning the instrument panel. Only two hours had passed—but above the accelerometer, a red light was flashing. Thrust was falling; *Diana* was losing power.

MERTON's first thought was that something had happened to the sail; perhaps the antispin devices had failed, and the rigging had become twisted. Swiftly, he checked the meters that showed the tension in the shroud-lines. Strange, on one side of the sail they were reading normally—but on the other, the pull was dropping slowly even as he watched.

In sudden understanding, Merton grabbed the periscope, switched to wide-angle vision, and started to scan the edge of the sail. Yes—there was the trouble, and it could have only one cause.

A huge, sharp-edged shadow had begun to slide across the gleaming silver of the sail. Darkness was falling upon *Diana*, as if a cloud had passed between her and the Sun. And in the dark, robbed of the rays that drove her, she would lose all thrust and drift helplessly through space.

But, of course, there were no clouds here, more than twenty

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thousand miles above the Earth. If there was a shadow, it must be made by man.

Merton grinned as he swung the periscope towards the Sun, switching in the filters that would allow him to look full into its blazing face without being blinded.

"Manœuvre 4a," he muttered to himself. "We'll see who can play best at *that* game."

It looked as if a giant planet was crossing the face of the Sun. A great black disc had bitten deep into its edge. Twenty miles astern, *Gossamer* was trying to arrange an artificial eclipse—specially for *Diana's* benefit.

The manœuvre was a perfectly legitimate one; back in the days of ocean racing, skippers had often tried to rob each other of the wind. With any luck, you could leave your rival becalmed, with his sails collapsing around him—and be well ahead before he could undo the damage.

Merton had no intention of being caught so easily. There was plenty of time to take evasive action; things happened very slowly, when you were running a solar sailing-boat. It would be at least twenty minutes before *Gossamer* could slide completely across the face of the Sun, and leave him in darkness.

Diana's tiny computer—the size of a matchbox, but the equivalent of a thousand human mathematicians—considered the problem for a full second and then flashed the answer. He'd have to open control panels three and four, until the sail had developed an extra twenty degrees of tilt; then the radiation pressure would blow him out of *Gossamer's* dangerous shadow, back into the full blast of the Sun. It was a pity to interfere with the autopilot, which had been carefully programmed to give the fastest possible run—but that, after all, was why he was here. This was what made solar yachting a sport, rather than a battle between computers.

Out went control lines one to six, slowly undulating like sleepy snakes as they momentarily lost their tension. Two miles away, the triangular panels began to open lazily, spilling sunlight through the sail. Yet, for a long time, nothing seemed to happen. It was hard to grow accustomed to this slow motion world, where it took minutes for the effects of any action to become visible to the eye. Then Merton saw that the sail was indeed tipping towards the Sun—and that *Gossamer's* shadow was sliding harmlessly away, its cone of darkness lost in the deeper night of space.

Long before the shadow had vanished, and the disc of the Sun had cleared again, he reversed the tilt and brought *Diana* back on course. Her new momentum would carry her clear of the

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danger; no need to overdo it, and upset his calculations by sidestepping too far. That was another rule that was hard to learn. The very moment you had started something happening in space, it was already time to think about stopping it.

He reset the alarm, ready for the next natural or man-made emergency; perhaps *Gossamer*, or one of the other contestants, would try the same trick again. Meanwhile, it was time to eat, though he did not feel particularly hungry. One used little physical energy in space, and it was easy to forget about food. Easy—and dangerous; for when an emergency arose, you might not have the reserves needed to deal with it.

He broke open the first of the meal packets, and inspected it without enthusiasm. The name on the label—SPACETASTIES—was enough to put him off. And he had grave doubts about the promise printed underneath: Guaranteed Crumbless. It had been said that crumbs were a greater danger to space vehicles than meteorites. They could drift into the most unlikely places, causing shortcircuits, blocking vital jets and getting into instruments that were supposed to be hermetically sealed.

Still, the liverwurst went down pleasantly enough; so did the chocolate and the pineapple purée. The plastic coffee-bulb was warming on the electric heater when the outside world broke in upon his solitude, as the radio operator on the Commodore's launch routed a call to him.

"Dr. Merton? If you can spare the time, Jeremy Blair would like a few words with you." Blair was one of the more responsible news commentators, and Merton had been on his programme many times. He could refuse to be interviewed, of course, but he liked Blair, and at the moment he could certainly not claim to be too busy. "I'll take it," he answered.

"Hullo, Dr. Merton," said the commentator immediately. "Glad you can spare a few minutes. And congratulations—you seem to be ahead of the field."

"Too early in the game to be sure of that," Merton answered cautiously.

"Tell me, doctor—why did you decide to sail *Diana* yourself? Just because it's never been done before?"

"Well, isn't that a very good reason? But it wasn't the only one, of course." He paused, choosing his words carefully. "You know how critically the performance of a sun-yacht depends on its mass. A second man, with all his supplies, would mean another five hundred pounds. That could easily be the difference between winning and losing."

"And you're quite certain that you can handle *Diana* alone?"

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"Reasonably sure, thanks to the automatic controls I've designed. My main job is to supervise and make decisions."

"But—two square miles of sail! It just doesn't seem possible for one man to cope with all that!"

Merton laughed.

"Why not? Those two square miles produce a maximum pull of just ten pounds. I can exert more force with my little finger."

"Well, thank you, doctor. And good luck."

As the commentator signed off, Merton felt a little ashamed of himself. For his answer had been only part of the truth; and he was sure that Blair was shrewd enough to know it.

There was just one reason why he was here, alone in space. For almost forty years he had worked with teams of hundreds or even thousands of men, helping to design the most complex vehicles that the world had ever seen. For the last twenty years he had led one of those teams, and watched his creations go soaring to the stars. (But there were failures that he could never forget, even though the fault had not been his.) He was famous, with a successful career behind him. Yet he had never done anything by himself; always he had been one of an army.

This was his very last chance of individual achievement, and he would share it with no one. There would be no more solar yachting for at least five years, as the period of the quiet Sun ended and the cycle of bad weather began, with radiation storms bursting through the Solar System. When it was safe again for these frail, unshielded craft to venture aloft, he would be too old. If, indeed, he was not too old already . . .

He dropped the empty food containers into the waste disposal, and turned once more to the periscope. At first, he could find only five of the other yachts; there was no sign of *Woomera*. It took him several minutes to locate her—a dim, star-eclipsing phantom, neatly caught in the shadow of *Lebedev*. He could imagine the frantic efforts the Australasians were making to extricate themselves, and wondered how they had fallen into the trap. It suggested that *Lebedev* was unusually manœuvrable; she would bear watching, though she was too far away to menace *Diana* at the moment.

NOW the Earth had almost vanished. It had waned to a narrow, brilliant bow of light that was moving steadily towards the Sun. Dimly outlined within that burning bow was the night side of the planet, with the phosphorescent gleams of

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great cities showing here and there through gaps in the clouds. The disc of darkness had already blanked out a huge section of the Milky Way; in a few minutes, it would start to encroach upon the Sun.

The light was fading. A purple, twilight hue—the glow of many sunsets, thousands of miles below—was falling across the sail, as *Diana* slipped silently into the shadow of Earth. The Sun plummeted below that invisible horizon. Within minutes, it was night.

Merton looked back along the orbit he had traced, now a quarter of the way around the world. One by one he saw the brilliant stars of the other yachts wink out, as they joined him in the brief night. It would be an hour before the Sun emerged from that enormous black shield, and through all that time they would be completely helpless, coasting without power.

He switched on the external spotlight, and started to search the now darkened sail with its beam. Already, the thousands of acres of film were beginning to wrinkle and become flaccid; the shroud-lines were slackening, and must be wound in lest they become entangled. But all this was expected; everything was going as planned.

Fifty miles astern, *Arachne* and *Santa Maria* were not so lucky. Merton learnt of their troubles when the radio burst into life on the emergency circuit.

"Number Two, Number Six—this is Control. You are on a collision course. Your orbits will intersect in sixty-five minutes! Do you require assistance?"

There was a long pause while the two skippers digested this bad news. Merton wondered who was to blame; perhaps one yacht had been trying to shadow the other, and had not completed the manœuvre before they were both caught in darkness. Now there was nothing that either could do; they were slowly but inexorably converging together, unable to change course by a fraction of a degree.

Yet, sixty-five minutes! That would just bring them out into sunlight again, as they emerged from the shadow of the Earth. They still had a slim chance, if their sails could snatch enough power to avoid a crash. There must be some frantic calculations going on, aboard *Arachne* and *Santa Maria*.

Arachne answered first; her reply was just what Merton had expected.

"Number Six calling Control. We don't need assistance, thank you. We'll work this out for ourselves."

I wonder, thought Merton. But at least it will be interesting

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to watch. The first real drama of the race was approaching—exactly above the line of midnight on the sleeping Earth.

For the next hour, Merton's own sail kept him too busy to worry about *Arachne* and *Santa Maria*. It was hard to keep a good watch on that fifty million square feet of dim plastic out there in the darkness, illuminated only by his narrow spotlight and the rays of the still distant Moon. From now on, for almost half his orbit round the Earth, he must keep the whole of this immense area edge-on to the Sun. During the next twelve or fourteen hours, the sail would be a useless encumbrance; for he would be heading into the Sun, and its rays could only drive him backwards along his orbit. It was a pity that he could not furl the sail completely, until he was ready to use it again. But no one had yet found a practical way of doing this.

Far below, there was the first hint of dawn along the edge of the Earth. In ten minutes, the Sun would emerge from its eclipse; the coasting yachts would come to life again as the blast of radiation struck their sails. That would be the moment of crisis for *Arachne* and *Santa Maria*—and, indeed, for all of them.

Merton swung the periscope until he found the two dark shadows drifting against the stars. They were very close together—perhaps less than three miles apart. They might, he decided, just be able to make it . . .

Dawn flashed like an explosion along the rim of Earth, as the Sun rose out of the Pacific. The sail and shroud-lines glowed a brief crimson, then gold, then blazed with the pure white light of day. The needles of the dynamometers began to lift from their zeros—but only just. *Diana* was still almost completely weightless, for with the sail pointing towards the Sun, her acceleration was now only a few millionths of a gravity.

But *Arachne* and *Santa Maria* were crowding on all the sail that they could manage, in their desperate attempt to keep apart. Now, while there was less than two miles between them, their glittering plastic clouds were unfurling and expanding with agonising slowness, as they felt the first delicate push of the Sun's rays. Almost every TV screen on Earth would be mirroring this protracted drama; and even now, at this very last minute, it was impossible to tell what the outcome would be.

The two skippers were stubborn men. Either could have cut his sail, and fallen back to give the other a chance; but neither would do so. Too much prestige, too many millions, too many reputations, were at stake. And so, silently and softly as snowflakes falling on a winter night, *Arachne* and *Santa Maria* collided.

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The square kite crawled almost imperceptibly into the circular spider's-web; the long ribbons of the shroud-lines twisted and tangled together with dreamlike slowness. Even aboard *Diana*, busy with his own rigging, Merton could scarcely tear his eyes away from this silent, long drawn out disaster.

For more than ten minutes the billowing, shining clouds continued to merge into one inextricable mass. Then the crew capsules tore loose and went their separate ways, missing each other by hundreds of yards. With a flare of rockets, the safety launches hurried to pick them up.

That leaves five of us, thought Merton. He felt sorry for the skippers who had so thoroughly eliminated each other, only a few hours after the start of the race; but they were young men, and would have another chance.

Within minutes, the five had dropped to four. From the very beginning, Merton had had doubts about the slowly rotating *Sunbeam*. Now he saw them justified.

The Martian ship had failed to tack properly; her spin had given her too much stability. Her great ring of a sail was turning to face the Sun, instead of being edge-on to it. She was being blown back along her course at almost her maximum acceleration.

That was about the most maddening thing that could happen to a skipper—worse even than a collision, for he could blame only himself. But no one would feel much sympathy for the frustrated colonials, as they dwindled slowly astern. They had made too many brash boasts before the race, and what had happened to them was poetic justice.

Yet it would not do to write off *Sunbeam* completely. With almost half a million miles still to go, she might still pull ahead. Indeed, if there were a few more casualties, she might be the only one to complete the race. It had happened before.

However, the next twelve hours were uneventful, as the Earth waxed in the sky from new to full. There was little to do while the fleet drifted round the unpowered half of its orbit, but Merton did not find the time hanging heavily on his hands. He caught a few hours sleep, ate two meals, wrote up his log, and became involved in several more radio interviews. Sometimes, though rarely, he talked to the other skippers, exchanging greetings and friendly taunts. But most of the time he was content to float in weightless relaxation, beyond all the cares of Earth, happier than he had been for many years. He was—as far as any man could be in space—master of his own fate, sailing the ship upon which he had lavished so much skill, so much love, that she had become part of his very being.

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The next casualty came when they were passing the line between Earth and Sun, and were just beginning the powered half of the orbit. Aboard *Diana*, Merton saw the great sail stiffen as it tilted to catch the rays that drove it. The acceleration began to climb up from the microgravities, though it would be hours yet before it would reach its maximum value.

It would never reach it for *Gossamer*. The moment when power came on again was always critical, and she failed to survive it.

Blair's radio commentary, which Merton had left running at low volume, alerted him with the news: "Hullo, *Gossamer* has the wriggles!" He hurried to the periscope, but at first could see nothing wrong with the great circular disc of *Gossamer's* sail. It was difficult to study it, as it was almost edge-on to him and so appeared as a thin ellipse; but presently he saw that it was twisting back and forth in slow, irresistible oscillations. Unless the crew could damp out these waves, by properly timed but gentle tugs on the shroud-lines, the sail would tear itself to pieces.

They did their best, and after twenty minutes it seemed that they had succeeded. Then, somewhere near the centre of the sail, the plastic film began to rip. It was slowly driven outwards by the radiation pressure, like smoke coiling upwards from a fire. Within a quarter of an hour, nothing was left but the delicate tracery of the radial spars that had supported the great web. Once again there was a flare of rockets, as a launch moved in to retrieve the *Gossamer's* capsule and her dejected crew.

"Getting rather lonely up here, isn't it?" said a conversational voice over the ship-to-ship radio.

"Not for you, Dimitri," retorted Merton. "You've still got company back there at the end of the field. I'm the one who's lonely, up here in front." It was not an idle boast. By this time *Diana* was three hundred miles ahead of the next competitor, and his lead should increase still more rapidly in the hours to come.

Aboard *Lebedev*, Dimitri Markoff gave a good-natured chuckle. He did not sound, Merton thought, at all like a man who had resigned himself to defeat.

"Remember the legend of the tortoise and the hare," answered the Russian. "A lot can happen in the next quarter-million miles."

It happened much sooner than that, when they had completed their first orbit of Earth and were passing the starting line again—though thousands of miles higher, thanks to the extra energy the Sun's rays had given them. Merton had taken careful sights on

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the other yachts, and had fed the figures into the computer. The answer it gave for *Woomera* was so absurd that he immediately did a recheck.

There was no doubt of it—the Australasians were catching up at a completely fantastic rate. No solar yacht could possibly have such an acceleration, unless—

A swift look through the periscope gave the answer. *Woomera's* rigging, pared back to the very minimum of mass, had given way. It was her sail alone, still maintaining its shape, that was racing up behind him like a handkerchief blown before the wind. Two hours later it fluttered past, less than twenty miles away. But long before that, the Australasians had joined the growing crowd aboard the Commodore's launch.

So now it was a straight fight between *Diana* and *Lebedev*—for though the Martians had not given up, they were a thousand miles astern and no longer counted as a serious threat. For that matter, it was hard to see what *Lebedev* could do to overtake *Diana's* lead. But all the way round the second lap—through eclipse again, and the long, slow drift against the Sun, Merton felt a growing unease.

He knew the Russian pilots and designers. They had been trying to win this race for twenty years and after all, it was only fair that they should, for had not Pyotr Nikolayevich Lebedev been the first man to detect the pressure of sunlight, back at the very beginning of the Twentieth Century? But they had never succeeded.

And they would never stop trying. Dimitri was up to something—and it would be spectacular.

ABOARD the official launch, a thousand miles behind the racing yachts, Commodore van Stratten looked at the radiogram with angry dismay. It had travelled more than a hundred million miles, from the chain of solar observatories swinging high above the blazing surface of the Sun, and it brought the worst possible news.

The Commodore—his title, of course, was purely honorary—back on Earth he was Professor of Astrophysics at Harvard—had been half expecting it. Never before had the race been arranged so late in the season; there had been many delays, they had gambled and now, it seemed, they might all lose.

Deep beneath the surface of the Sun, enormous forces were gathering. At any moment, the energies of a million hydrogen bombs might burst forth in the awesome explosion known as a

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solar flare. Climbing at millions of miles an hour, an invisible fireball many times the size of Earth would leap from the Sun, and head out across space.

The cloud of electrified gas would probably miss the Earth completely. But if it did not, it would arrive in just over a day. Spaceships could protect themselves, with their shielding and their powerful magnetic screens. But the lightly-built solar yachts, with their paper-thin walls, were defenceless against such a menace. The crews would have to be taken off, and the race abandoned.

John Merton still knew nothing of this as he brought *Diana* round the Earth for the second time. If all went well, this would be the last circuit, both for him and for the Russians. They had spiralled upwards by thousands of miles, gaining energy from the Sun's rays. On this lap, they should escape from Earth completely—and head outwards on the long run to the Moon. It was a straight race now. *Sunbeam's* crew had finally withdrawn, exhausted, after battling valiantly with their spinning sail for more than a hundred thousand miles.

Merton did not feel tired; he had eaten and slept well, and *Diana* was behaving herself admirably. The autopilot, tensioning the rigging like a busy little spider, kept the great sail trimmed to the Sun more accurately than any human skipper. Though by this time, the two square miles of plastic sheet must have been riddled by hundreds of micrometeorites, the pinhead-sized punctures had produced no falling off of thrust.

He had only two worries. The first was shroud-line Number eight, which could no longer be adjusted properly. Without any warning, the reel had jammed; even after all these years of astronautical engineering, bearings sometimes seized up in vacuum. He could neither lengthen nor shorten the line, and would have to navigate as best he could with the others. Luckily, the most difficult manœuvres were over. From now on, *Diana* would have the Sun behind her as she sailed straight down the solar wind. And as the old-time sailors had often said, it was easy to handle a boat when the wind was blowing over your shoulder.

His other worry was *Lebedev*, still dogging his heels three hundred miles astern. The Russian yacht had shown remarkable manœuvrability, thanks to the four great panels that could be tilted around the central sail. All her flip-overs as she rounded Earth had been carried out with superb precision; but to gain manœuvrability she must have sacrificed speed. You could not have it both ways. In the long, straight haul ahead, Merton

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should be able to hold his own. Yet he could not be certain of victory until, three or four days from now, *Diana* went flashing past the far side of the Moon.

And then, in the fiftieth hour of the race, near the end of the second orbit round Earth, Markoff sprang his little surprise.

"Hullo, John," he said casually, over the ship-to-ship circuit. "I'd like you to watch this. It should be interesting."

Merton drew himself across to the periscope and turned up the magnification to the limit. There in the field of view, a most improbable sight against the background of the stars, was the glittering Maltese cross of *Lebedev*, very small but very clear. And then, as he watched, the four arms of the cross slowly detached themselves from the central square and went drifting away, with all their spars and rigging, into space.

Markoff had jettisoned all unnecessary mass, now that he was coming up to escape velocity and need no longer plod patiently around the Earth, gaining momentum on each circuit. From now on, *Lebedev* would be almost unsteerable—but that did not matter. All the tricky navigation lay behind her. It was as if an old-time yachtsman had deliberately thrown away his rudder and heavy keel—knowing that the rest of the race would be straight downwind over a calm sea.

"Congratulations, Dimitri," Merton radioed. "It's a neat trick. But it's not good enough—you can't catch up now."

"I've not finished yet," the Russian answered. "There's an old winter's tale in my country, about a sleigh being chased by wolves. To save himself, the driver has to throw off the passengers one by one. Do you see the analogy?"

Merton did, all too well. On this final straight lap, Dimitri no longer needed his co-pilot. *Lebedev* could really be stripped down for action.

"Alexis won't be very happy about this," Merton replied. "Besides, it's against the rules."

"Alexis isn't happy, but I'm the captain. He'll just have to wait around for ten minutes until the Commodore picks him up. And the regulations say nothing about the size of the crew—you should know that."

Merton did not answer. He was too busy doing some hurried calculations, based on what he knew of *Lebedev's* design. By the time he had finished, he knew that the race was still in doubt. *Lebedev* would be catching up with him at just about the time he hoped to pass the Moon.

But the outcome of the race was already being decided, ninety-two million miles away.

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ON Solar Observatory Three, far inside the orbit of Mercury, the automatic instruments recorded the whole history of the flare. A hundred million square miles of the Sun's surface suddenly exploded in such blue-white fury that, by comparison, the rest of the disc paled to a dull glow. Out of that seething inferno, twisting and turning like a living creature in the magnetic fields of its own creation, soared the electrified plasma of the great flare. Ahead of it, moving at the speed of light, went the warning flash of ultra-violet and X-rays. That would reach Earth in eight minutes, and was relatively harmless. Not so the charged atoms that were following behind at their leisurely four million miles an hour—and which, in just over a day, would engulf *Diana*, *Lebedev*, and their accompanying little fleet in a cloud of lethal radiation.

The Commodore left his decision to the last possible minute. Even when the jet of plasma had been tracked past the orbit of Venus, there was a chance that it might miss the Earth. But when it was less than four hours away, and had already been picked up by the Moon-based radar network, he knew that there was no hope. All solar sailing was over for the next five or six years until the Sun was quiet again.

A great sigh of disappointment swept across the Solar System. *Diana* and *Lebedev* were halfway between Earth and Moon, running neck and neck—and now no one would ever know which was the better boat. The enthusiasts would argue the result for years; history would merely record: Race cancelled owing to solar storm.

When John Merton received the order, he felt a bitterness he had not known since childhood. Across the years, sharp and clear, came the memory of his tenth birthday. He had been promised an exact scale model of the famous spaceship *Morning Star*, and for weeks had been planning how he would assemble it, where he would hang it up in his bedroom. And then, at the last moment, his father had broken the news. "I'm sorry, John—it costs too much money. Maybe next year . . ."

Half a century and a successful lifetime later, he was a heart-broken boy again.

For a moment, he thought of disobeying the Commodore. Suppose he sailed on, ignoring the warning? Even if the race were abandoned, he could make a crossing to the Moon that would stand in the record books for generations.

But that would be worse than stupidity. It would be suicide—and a very unpleasant form of suicide. He had seen men die of radiation poisoning, when the magnetic shielding of their ships

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had failed in deep space. No—nothing was worth that . . .

He felt sorry for Dimitri Markoff as for himself; they had both deserved to win, and now victory would go to neither. No man could argue with the Sun in one of its rages, even though he might ride upon its beams to the edge of space.

Only fifty miles astern now, the Commodore's launch was drawing alongside *Lebedev*, preparing to take off her skipper. There went the silver sail, as Dimitri—with feelings that he would share—cut the rigging. The tiny capsule would be taken back to Earth, perhaps to be used again—but a sail was spread for one voyage only.

He could press the jettison button now, and save his rescuers a few minutes of time. But he could not do so. He wanted to stay aboard to the very end, on the little boat that had been for so long a part of his dreams and his life. The great sail was spread now at right angles to the Sun, exerting its utmost thrust. Long ago it had torn him clear of Earth—and *Diana* was still gaining speed.

Then, out of nowhere, beyond all doubt or hesitation, he knew what must be done. For the last time, he sat down before the computer that had navigated him halfway to the Moon.

When he had finished, he packed the log and his few personal belongings. Clumsily—for he was out of practice, and it was not an easy job to do by oneself—he climbed into the emergency survival suit. He was just sealing the helmet when the Commodore's voice called over the radio. "We'll be alongside in five minutes, Captain. Please cut your sail so we won't foul it."

John Merton, first and last skipper of the sun-yacht *Diana*, hesitated for a moment. He looked for the last time round the tiny cabin, with its shining instruments and its neatly arranged controls, now all locked in their final positions. Then he said to the microphone: "I'm abandoning ship. Take your time to pick me up. *Diana* can look after herself."

There was no reply from the Commodore, and for that he was grateful. Professor van Stratten would have guessed what was happening—and would know that, in these final moments, he wished to be left alone.

He did not bother to exhaust the airlock, and the rush of escaping gas blew him gently out into space; the thrust he gave her then was his last gift to *Diana*. She dwindled away from him, sail glittering splendidly in the sunlight that would be hers for centuries to come. Two days from now she would flash past the Moon; but the Moon, like the Earth, could never catch her. Without his mass to slow her down, she would gain two thousand

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miles an hour in every day of sailing. In a month, she would be travelling faster than any ship that man had ever built.

As the Sun's rays weakened with distance, so her acceleration would fall. But even at the orbit of Mars, she would be gaining a thousand miles an hour in every day. Long before then, she would be moving too swiftly for the Sun itself to hold her. Faster than any comet that had ever streaked in from the stars, she would be heading out into the abyss.

The glare of rockets, only a few miles away, caught Merton's eye. The launch was approaching to pick him up at thousands of times the acceleration that *Diana* could ever attain. But engines could burn for a few minutes only, before they exhausted their fuel—while *Diana* would still be gaining speed, driven outwards by the Sun's eternal fires, for ages yet to come.

" Good-bye, little ship," said John Merton. " I wonder what eyes will see you next, how many thousand years from now? "

At last he felt at peace, as the blunt torpedo of the launch nosed up beside him. He would never win the race to the Moon; but his would be the first of all man's ships to set sail on the long journey to the stars.

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CARDS ON THE TABLE!

When I was but a boy,
'Twas my once-a-yearly joy
To arise of a Yuletide morning,
And eagerly behold
The crimson and the gold
Of the messages the mantelpiece adorning,
There were angels, there were squires,
There were steeples, there were spires,
There were villagers, and mistletoe and holly . . .
And I innocently thought them rather jolly . . .

Oh, give me an old-fashioned Christmas card,
With mistletoe galore, and holly by the yard,
With galumptious greens and gorgeous scarlets,
With crackling logs and apple-cheeked varlets,
With horses prancing down a frosty road,
And a stagecoach laden with a festive load,
And the light from the wayside windows streaming,
And a white moon rising and one star gleaming.

OGDEN NASH

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Its effect was utterly devastating

THE SMILE

BY ANN DRYSDALE

MARCHMONT is in Edinburgh. It is a compact citadel within a city—grey, inviolate, and quite unlike anything most visitors to Edinburgh have ever seen before.

It is a formal square of a number of streets that can be counted on the fingers without resort to the toes, and each street consists of two houses, using the word house in its Scottish sense, of course.

These houses stretch from one end of the street to the other, and face each other with an air of quizzical challenge. They have front doors at intervals along their lengths, each with a formidable array of brass bellpushes which, deceptively, one pulls to gain admittance. They have an interminable series of windows which progress with mathematic precision: two sash, one bay; two sash, one bay, as far as the eye can see.

Above each front door, sprouting off a central spiral stair, are the Scotsman's houses. They are owner-occupied. No rent man ever treads the resounding stone steps. An Englishman would call them tenements, but the owner would put him right, tight-lipped, "They only have tenements in Glasgow."

It is the Englishman's yearning for a detached existence that makes him kick against such communal dwellings. The sophisticated Scot has managed to retain his independence in Marchmont by a deft change of terminology and the ability to keep himself respectfully aloof. The great houses have their regimented windows front and back; and behind the houses a communal garden, kept neat by a visiting gardener, is backed by the rear windows of the nether block. The front windows stare unblinking at their opposite numbers, missing nothing.

Elsie McPhaly was not fond of gardens. Her front window, net-curtained, was her chosen vantage point.

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She was the wife of Dougal McPhaly, who was a good husband to her and to his local golf club. She was not young, but no one would hesitate to describe her as bonnie. She was plump, but the flesh was firm as a sound apple, and beneath the cashmere jumper and the good suit beat a heart that was as big as a coal-scuttle, fluttered a spirit as full of the promise of fun as an unexpected tax rebate.

She was a pillar of the Ladies' Guild and had her code of behaviour, but beneath these was a spirit of adventure that broke the surface without a ripple when she felt she was alone.

Sometimes in the night, with the striped-flannelled Dougal uttering his regular breaths at her side, like a child tearing calico in fits and starts, she would slip on her knees at the foot of her dream Caliph and play the dulcimer to him. In the daylight she would not know what a dulcimer could possibly look like, but at night it was a sensuously curved guitar with rainbow ribbons against whose dark wood her arms shone white, and its music was sweet.

When the nights were hot, she would creep out of the bed and lie on the carpet, blowing gouts of its plum-coloured fluff into the darkness, and dream nameless dreams.

And when she sat at her window, she was anybody but Elsie McPhaly, wife of Dougal McPhaly, who claimed to play off six at St. Andrews and off four at the local club. Other things, other people, absorbed and fascinated her as she sat, looking.

It was Festival fortnight. Edinburgh was the centre, briefly, of the cultural universe, but the spirit of youth and adventure had not lifted Marchmont's grey stone face. It was September, and the sun was shining.

Elsie was sitting on the chaise longue, with her morning coffee. Outside the house opposite, a dog had collapsed in the dusty sunshine and lay, shuddering with occasional vivid dreams; the black patches of its piebald coat turned sandy-red by the bright light, its white parts creamed by contrast with the scrubbed front step.

Just inside, in the semi darkness, stood a little girl. She seemed sad and played with the hem of her dress, looking down. Elsie had no children. As she watched, a second little girl, long-pigtailed, wearing her mother's shoes and carrying a battered handbag, slipped up beside the first and took her hand. An electric spark seemed to pass between them and together they clattered off down the cobbled street.

Only after she had watched them all the way to the corner

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did Elsie permit herself to cast her eyes upwards to the window opposite her own, to see if the lady was there.

For weeks, Elsie had watched this nameless woman. She called her "the lady" because of her immaculate dress, the creamy froths of nylon négligé that suggested to Elsie that this object of her surreptitious admiration did not enjoy good health. Consumption? Elsie tried an experimental cough and lifted her legs up beside her on the chaise longue.

The lady's pale face made her lips shine an incredible red, so that when she smiled, Elsie could savour the full beauty of it, even through the glass.

That smile. It was a seraphic summing-up of all that Elsie had ever aspired to. It tinged her face with such a winsome sadness, and one corner of her mouth lifted with the promise of laughter. It was always accompanied by a faint tossing gesture of her impeccable golden curls, and its effect was devastating.

For she smiled at people. Visitors in the street, staring around them, lost in the forbidding sameness of Marchmont, would catch the glint of those carmine lips and turn their steps to her front door, which swung open to receive them, swung inwards sesame-wise by the incredible brass-levered mechanism provided for each household to admit their visitors without coming downstairs.

Elsie would watch the lady pour her visitors a drink from a polished cabinet, then lead them to a room whose contents she could not see. She imagined this room wide and airy, chandeliers, perhaps, with Louis Quatorze and tapestries filling the space occupied in her own house by their back bedroom. She imagined the visitors telling the housebound lady of the places they had visited, of things they had seen, brightening her dull life with news from far and wide.

She made again her constant resolution, that she would one day visit the lady herself—it would cheer her up, for she had so many men visiting—surely a little female gossip would do her good.

But it was Festival fortnight. Elsie knew she could never hope to match the conversation of the people who were to be found in the streets now. Here was a young man with a rucksack and a beard. French, perhaps. The lady across the street pulled her curtain just a little—and smiled.

The Frenchman stopped, looked, smiled, and went straight to the front door.

But what was this new sensation fluttering deep down in Elsie McPhaly? At first it was a slight tug at the pit of her

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stomach, but it grew and grew until it was big enough to cause her pain, loud enough to play a tune on, clear enough to recognise.

It was jealousy.

Elsie was very surprised, and not a little disturbed. She bent her head to her Abernethy biscuit and turned her thoughts to other matters. But the sensation was still there, and it had crystallised into a question. Why not me, Elsie McPhaly?

When she looked up, the lady and her guest had withdrawn into the back room and the street was deserted.

She slipped off the chaise longue and went to the mirror. With a grim determination she smiled at herself and held the smile rigid while she analysed it.

It was like hers, very like, but it still lacked something—a little more lift at the corners perhaps—but no, that made her look too profoundly happy.

After a few minutes she could judge the correct degree of wistfulness to a fraction, but the slight upward twist at one side that bade the actual welcome took a little longer. Then came the final test.

She turned her back on the mirror and smiled at the opposite wall. She gave it a minute or two to settle, then turned slowly through a hundred and eighty degrees and looked at the reflection. It was perfect.

She almost ran to the window. A man was turning into the street, looking a little lost. He had a clean white shirt, she noted, open at the neck, with a green cravat, and his hair was very dark. Surely an Italian, lost and lonely. More than all these, he had a guitar. Elsie smiled.

He saw her, flashed white teeth, and turned to the front door. Oh, how nimbly Elsie ran to the lever on the landing to open the way for him.

Now he was upstairs, in the front room, sipping coffee from a cup that was a twin to her own, seated in the hastily-plumped armchair while she perched on the chaise longue.

As they drank, they talked. He was not Italian, but Welsh. Festival? Was there a Festival? He had come to play rugby at Murrayfield, and the guitar belonged to a friend of his who had played it in the coach.

He came and sat beside her on the chaise longue. A sudden vision of Dougal's questioning face made her stand up and draw the curtains. When she turned and found him lying on the couch, she sat down in surprise, and when his fingers reached for the tiny pearl buttons on her cashmere jumper, she honestly

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tried to protest. Poor Elsie McPhaly was out of her depth.

She coped very well, considering that the element of surprise had not been in her favour, but she was still a little hazy when he put on his white shirt, knotted his green cravat and let himself out.

She sang to herself as she washed up the extra cup and tidied the front room.

It was as she was emptying the ashtrays that she caught sight of the crumpled pound note lying on the mantelpiece. She picked it up, deeply touched.

At first she thought of hats and dresses and stockings, but gnawing at the back of her mind was a tiny Dougal, and she thought of golf instead. The new putter he wanted so badly—she put the note in her pocket, resolved.

But one pound wouldn't buy a golf club, surely?

Elsie opened the curtains and looked out. The lady was back, staring straight at her with a rather unpleasant scowl spoiling her admired face. Elsie smiled at her.

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" But what if it isn't some kind of advertising stunt?"

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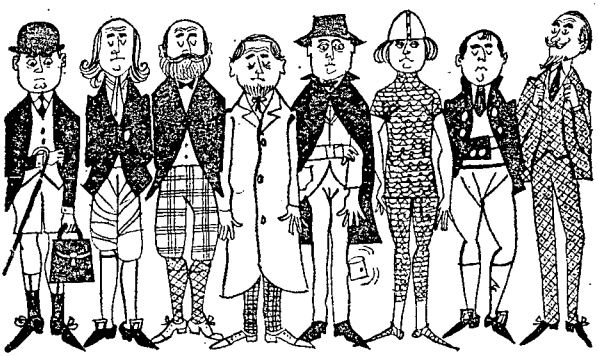

Cut Down to Size

In Full Fig-leaf

It was from Newtimber that Lord Buxton set out one summer morning in full fig to attend a Cabinet meeting. He decided to walk to the station and, having time in hand, he sat by the way at the foot of a tree, listening to the birds. But no sooner was he in his first-class compartment than trouble began. He had sat on a nest of red ants, and the ants were beginning to eat him. He pulled down the blinds, took off his pin-striped trousers and shook them out of the window. At that moment an express-train passed in the reverse direction, and the blast it caused snatched the trousers from his hands. At each stop he pulled down the blind and clung to the door handle. The Postmaster-General arrived at Waterloo wearing a silk hat and tail-coat, but trouserless. A guard was beckoned, and a pair of oily blue overalls from the lamp-room must have shocked Lulu Harcourt and even startled the Prime Minister when their colleague entered the Cabinet Room . . .

L. E. JONES, *An Edwardian Youth*

Fit for a King!

Dined with my dear friend Serjeant Talfourd. He said Wordsworth went to court in Roger's clothes, buckles and stockings, and wore Davy's sword. Moxon had hard work to make the dress fit. It was a squeeze, but by pulling and hauling they got him in. Fancy the high priest of mountain and of flood on his knees in a court, the quiz of courtiers, in a dress that did not belong to him, with a sword that was not his own and a coat which he borrowed!

B. R. HAYDON, *Autobiography*

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Press Cutting

King Edward defied convention occasionally at Marienbad. In 1903, for example, when greeting a friend at the railway station, he caused astonishment by appearing on the platform clad in a green cap, with a pink tie and white gloves, knee-breeches, grey slippers and a brown overcoat with loud checks: "Loyal subjects must sincerely hope," the *Tailor and Cutter* commented severely (17 September, 1903), "that His Majesty has not brought this outfit home."

PHILIP MAGNUS, *King Edward VII*

Coat

The doors opened at our floor, and we got out and headed for a rack of topcoats. A tall, dapper clerk approached us, and Hemingway shoved his hands into his pants pockets and crouched forward. "I think I still have credit in this joint," he said to the clerk.

The clerk cleared his throat. "Yes, sir," he said.

"Want to see coat," Hemingway said menacingly.

"Yes, sir," said the clerk. "What kind of coat did you wish to see, sir?"

"That one." He pointed to a straight-hanging, beltless tan gabardine coat on the rack. The clerk helped him into it and gently drew him over to a full-length mirror. "Hangs like a shroud," Hemingway said, tearing the coat off. "I'm tall on top. Got any other coat?" he asked, as though he expected the answer to be no. He edged impatiently toward the elevators.

"How about this one, sir, with a removable lining, sir?" the clerk said. This one had a belt. Hemingway tried it on, studied himself in the mirror, and then raised his arms as though he were aiming a rifle. "You going to use it for *shooting*, sir?" the clerk asked. Hemingway grunted . . .

LILLIAN ROSS, *Portrait of Hemingway*

Hilairious

He moved from one friend to the other in his huge black cape, designed by an Edwardian couturière, the pockets stuffed with maps and newspapers, bread and wine, French mouthwash and an old felt hat. On the rare occasions when he dressed for dinner, he would wear a tail-coat, black waistcoat, black tie and stiff shirt; latterly he took to false cuffs which he had difficulty in controlling . . .

ROBERT SPEAIGHT, *Hilaire Belloc*

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Morris Dance!

Morris, as an exponent of Mediaevalism, had laboriously and ingeniously fashioned himself a complete suit of chain armour into which his admiring friends helped him to encase his ample frame; but when, after a time, becoming distressed by its tightness, he endeavoured to discard it, he found to his dismay that this was not practicable. The strained links had interlaced and clung obstinately together. Stanhope pulled, Rossetti pulled, Burne-Jones and De Morgan pulled—the Mediaeval knight panted piteously in his instrument of torture till it was feared he would have an apoplectic fit ere he could be released by filing the metal asunder. Fortunately, at the critical moment, this was averted as the links suddenly gave way, and the unfortunate exponent of Mediaevalism issued from his painful cage minded to be content in the future with more modern garments.

A. M. W. STIRLING, *The Merry Wives of Battersea*

A Little Man . . .

St. Helena: We walked up the path together where General Buonaparte was standing. . . He was dressed in a plain green coat with silver buttons (each having a different device on), with an upright green velvet collar, on his left side was a large emblazoned star, the imperial eagle in the centre. Nankeen breeches and white silk stockings with large gold buckles in his shoes. He wears a large cocked hat not mounted . . . he is what we generally say of such a stature a little thick-set man with a corporation—a most inactive appearance, with a large head . . .

WILLIAM KERSHAW, 1815

Powerful Suit

Up to the time I was 29, actually twenty-nine, I was too shabby for any woman to tolerate me. I stalked about in a decaying green coat, cuffs trimmed with the scissors, terrible boots, and so on. Then I got a job to do and bought a suit of clothes with the proceeds. A lady immediately invited me to tea, threw her arms round me, and said she adored me. Since that time, whenever I have been left alone in a room with a female, she has invariably thrown her arms round me and declared she adored me. It is fate. Therefore beware. If you allow yourself to be left alone with me for a single moment, you will certainly throw your arms round me and declare you adore me; and I am not prepared to guarantee that my usual melancholy forbearance will be available in your case. BERNARD SHAW, *Letter to Ellen Terry*

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In this silence a shot rang clear and loud

WINGING SOUTH

BY EDMUND GILLIGAN

CATO heard the rifle shot just before bedtime while he watched the old moon set beyond the Catskill Mountains. Her earthward horn seemed to touch the ridge of his main barn. The crescent had the gay colour of sunflowers.

While he gazed with his usual pleasure, her colour thickened to a bronze hue. This made the stars appear so much brighter that he thought of the star upon a Christmas tree, a particular tree he had already chosen to be set up on the village green at Piety Corner down the valley. Ever since his square beard had become silver-white, he had been Piety Corner's Santa Claus. He played the part well because his beard couldn't be pulled off by some five-year-old cynic. And he had the proper colour in his face—a fresh, wind-beaten ruddiness acquired—so he said—by long sleigh rides from the North Pole.

It happened that his image in the kitchen window showed him that his beard needed trimming. Before he set about it, he stepped into the farmyard to size up the weather. He had hopes of another snowfall. The earth needed it badly. To the eastward, a mass of snow clouds began to shut off the lower stars. Cato rejoiced and lingered a while to enjoy the silent night.

Into this silence, the rifle shot rang clear and loud.

When the morning star rose into a green and cloudless sky, Cato hurried into his woodlands along the eastern shore of the lake called Binniewater. Snow had fallen the day before; only a little more had come down in the night. Among the cedars bordering his main orchard, he found the tracks of deer that had been startled in the night. Does had led off their fawns from the sheltered places where they had bedded down. Foxes had been on the move too, not hunting to and fro, but trotting straight

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out of the woods. Farther on he found the tracks of a bear, following the others to safer places.

The first advance of sunlight, dim under snow-weighted hemlock boughs, showed him the other marks—the footprints of a man. Cato followed them a quarter of a mile into a beechnut grove. By that time, he knew the man was a stranger because he had not taken an ancient deer trail, familiar to Cato and his friends. The stranger had made his way through difficult thickets and over fallen trees.

On the other side of the grove, Cato came upon a bloodied place. There the stranger had killed a deer. He had done it by the deer-stealer's trick—flashing a light into a doe's eyes and shooting while she stood still wondering.

"But why here?" It puzzled Cato that a meat hunter should kill a deer so far from the highway. It meant a full mile of hard going, especially if he dragged a deer. "Now, who may you be, mister, and what are you up to?" He gave his own answer, "You're after fox bounties and you killed a doe to hide your poison in. I'll not stand for it—no!"

In his sixty years of work and play upon that land, where his people, the Delahantys, had lived for nigh on three centuries, there had been strange happenings, some good, some not so good. The trick of poisoning hungry foxes to collect a few dollars—that was one of the bad things.

At this hour, Cato had other business, equally distressing, along the shores of Binniewater. He put it off a while to follow the stranger's footprints. These were so deep in the frost-lined oak leaves that he could tell the man had hoisted the deer to his shoulders.

"Big and strong. But no bigger nor stronger than I be."

The tracks led to the shore and vanished at the water's edge. A boat had been drawn up there. It had gone northward through the skim ice. Ice had formed again over its course.

Cato heard an uproar in the forest. A squall off the Hudson River had struck into the marsh and now came hurtling over Ram's Horn Creek. The squall gathered up the rattling of an ebb tide breaking ice in the stands of wild rice. Bare boughs of hazel and birch trees clattered. Cato smiled in pleasure. Among the fragrances of brackish pools and autumn leaves, a new aroma floated, fresher than his cider—the scent of a snowfall, bitter with Atlantic salt. He looked up to the hemlocks. Their spires bent far over and vanished under clouds of snowflakes that swept boisterously over him.

Pursuing his other business, he strode lithely to the edge of

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his woodland, where Binniewater sang out harshly in a wintry tune. There he saw something else that awakened an old distress.

"So! You are there."

He had looked first to the right and then to the left, where the nests of an osprey colony lay high on great hemlocks that he had stripped of boughs to provide nesting places. Those nests were empty. That he knew. All the younger pairs had migrated in the last weeks of November. Farther along the eastern shore, he made out the home of two of his old friends, the parent birds. They had built nine years ago on the crown of a dead pine tree that had been nearly a hundred feet tall.

Clearly, he saw the mother osprey, perched on the rim of their nest, a huge affair of willow twigs, cat-o'-nine-tails and odds and ends, such as twists of rope and leather thongs that Cato had left for them near their tree. Cato knew her well, knew her fancy for pretty things. Once he had left an oval stone veined with quartz and he had watched her carry it to her bed of cedar bark within the nest.

"You will not go south, vain woman?"

He knew her to be the mother bird because the sunlight shone directly on her breast, not white like her mate's, but prettily touched by fawn and darker hues of brown. She kept her amber-coloured eyes steadily on the sky, where the last of the snowflakes whirled far over the lake.

Cato followed her westward gaze. Aloft against the sky, her mate flew. Glinting flakes blew across his fathom-wide dark wingspread, and rising flakes struck slanting against his breast. Directly below the osprey, a flight of Canada geese broke out of the wedge pattern and turned to the water. A raft of geese, swimming strongly amid crackling ice, sent up their greeting calls. Scores of mallards and black ducks rose in alarm and quickly settled down. Those birds were on the migrating journey to southern waters, a journey that the ospreys must soon begin.

"And I hope you'll go this time, my friend," said Cato, "because it's a hard winter coming along in back of the geese."

In the first years since Cato came to know them, the ospreys had migrated with the other hawks. A winter ago, the elder pair had not departed. Cato believed they had stayed because they knew the winter was to be a mild one. Indeed, Binniewater had frozen over only once and the ospreys had been able to take fish most of the time. Even so, they had a hard time of it. He didn't wish to see again their hungry searches.

The osprey broke out of his flight and dropped directly towards

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his nest. He circled the tree three times. Cato heard his cry, a mild *chewk! chewk!* and watched him beat a way northward. There he hovered, his wings slowly beating.

"Yes, he wishes her to go. And she will, she will. A good wife like that."

She paid no heed to her mate's appeal. She waited until he again flew towards their nest. She left it in a powerful thrust of her wings and flew straight into the west until she passed over the shallows, where a tamarack tree lay stranded on a shoal. Folding her wings close, she dived steeply into the water, feet foremost. She vanished entirely under a spout of spray that fell sparkling over her entry. Before the ripple flattened, she emerged in a laborious beat of wings. Between her black talons, a lake trout writhed so violently that a little fish, just swallowed, slid from its gaping jaws.

Clear out of the water, she again hovered and, by beating her wings rapidly, shook off such a shower that for an instant Cato saw her tarrying in a rainbow. Before she began her ascent, she cleverly turned the trout until its head pointed forward. Cato had seen her do that scores of times and he believed that the change made her flight into the wind a little easier.

"And where are you, old man?" Cato searched the sky and at once made out the male osprey following his mate to their nest. He flew directly across her way and cried out again. At this, she changed her course and entered the forest to eat by herself. The male alighted on the nest and perched there, his head drooping in such a way that Cato imagined him to be rueful. The osprey cried out again. This time it seemed a beseechment to his mate.

Greatly to Cato's relief, the next act in the drama of migration began. Out of nests built below the ospreys', two grackles came, uttering a call that Cato had heard every winter—a shrill squeaking, like field mice at play. A score of other grackles joined the first pair and all of them coursed swiftly round and round, gleams of light shooting from their rich sheen. They became silent and, one by one, alighted near the osprey. Cato understood that the small birds knew the osprey to be a gentle hawk. So the grackles lived in peace there.

Again the grackles began their peculiar chatter. To the east, above the crowns of spruce and cedar, Cato saw an immense flock of birds appear in an orderly file, falling and rising in such numbers that they blurred the sky. The birds at the nest darted into the air to meet the migration. Thousands of wings whirred so loudly that Cato couldn't hear the water crashing on the shore.

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The great flock soared in glittering ranks near the osprey. They seemed to be summoning him to the south.

When they had gone, Cato came closer to watch the yielding of the osprey to his migrating instinct. The osprey had become agitated. He ran awkwardly up and down the rim of his nest. His instinct told him that he must protect his home against the blows of winter. In their first winters, Cato had seen them carry fresh twigs and reeds to the nest. They had built a barrier to break high winds and had completely covered that part in the middle where they had hatched their eggs.

Cato stepped behind a tamarack tree. Another such tree had been blown down nearer the shore. The osprey flew down to it. He examined many twigs and branches. He walked under the tree and directly beneath the trunk, he found a number of branches broken off and chose a branch that bore several cones. He grasped it in his talons and flew heavily to the nest.

His mate awaited him. He carried the branch down into the nest and, although he was now out of Cato's sight, Cato knew he wished her to examine the branch because she was the chief builder. She stayed on the rim. Taking delicate care, she rubbed her talons against the twigs and cleaned them of shreds of fish. After that, she raised her falcon head and gazed again into the darkening sky, where the evening star rose in a green haze. Not one wing beat in that sky, and no birds sang or cried except in a shallow place not far from the tree where a loon repeated a melancholy syllable. Out of the shadows thickening down the northern beaches, a party of hooded mergansers skimmed close to the water. Even while they flew, the darkness grew so much that Cato could make out only the white cockades of the drakes. The loon thrust its long bill upwards and repeated its declaration.

The osprey's mate now paid heed to him. She walked past his perch and cocked her head over the branch. She bent down close to the cones. Cato could barely see the stroke of her beak when she broke off a cone, which had taken on a vivid glow in the dusk. She passed out of his sight; a moment later, she appeared on the farther rim of the nest, carrying in her beak the branch itself. She let it fall to earth.

"Ah!" whispered Cato, "that's your way of saying you will not go."

By the time Cato reached his home, an ancient low-roofed cottage of stone where he had fended for himself many a year, the winter wind had begun to blow from the east, a change from the

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north to the salt bitterness of gales sweeping in from the far Atlantic. He opened the damper of the coal stove in his kitchen and built a fire of ash logs in the fireplace of his living-room. He made his supper and spent the evening sharpening the hooks of his ice-fishing gear—the tip-ups, which were laths of wood to be driven into slits near the ice holes. He renewed the tiny squares of red flannel attached to springs so arranged on the laths that the struggle of a hooked fish caused the flag to spring up, a signal to him.

While he worked, he heard the honking of thousands of geese streaming towards Binniewater. Close to midnight the endless calls struck a higher note, they became frantic. He went to the door.

The noise of breaking water had ceased. He knew what had happened. The lake had frozen to the first skim ice.

He scanned the brilliant sky. Through the bare boughs of twin birches near his barn, he saw the Great Bear shining clear, and overhead, he made out the Little Bear. He knew the geese were seeking the channels from Binniewater into Ram's Horn Creek and into the marsh, where the water must still be open. He knew that the early ice meant immediate hardship for the ospreys.

"Surely they will go first thing in the morning."

In the morning, he couldn't go anywhere himself, for the snow had set in again. When it stopped, the grey morning became terribly cold, close to zero. He had much work to do among his older apple trees and there were three hundred bushels of apples still to be taken to the cold-storage place up the river. He worked until nearly midnight and got up again early the next day to repeat the labour over and over again. When he had caught up with his chores, he went to his millpond below the main barn, cut a hole in the ice, and netted a pail of minnows for his fishing.

In returning to the house, Cato swung off to the right so that he might look at the lake shores. He couldn't see the ospreys' nest from that point. He searched the sky and found only a solitary crow flying against the sagging hemlock boughs. He had a barley field there and it opened a view across the lake. The winds had scoured part of the snow off the ice and there were squalls twisting back and forth. He saw a dark-clad man tramping across the lake.

"I guess it's you again, stranger."

That night, the below-zero temperature froze the lake ice so deeply that it began to crack and thunder. At daybreak, Cato set out with his tip-ups and minnows and his ice-cutting tools.

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He was cheerful enough at the thought of broiled pickerel for his supper. He became even more cheerful when he looked up at the snow-covered nest and saw that the birds were not there. He had just set foot on the ice to choose a place to cut the first hole when he saw a flash of curious light in a cedar thicket farther up the shore. Cato stepped back.

Presently a grey fox, his handsome brush aloft, came trotting up the wind. Cato thought he had a famished look about him. In his short, nervous steps, and in sudden halts, he revealed the uneasiness of a night hunter impelled to hunt by day.

"Now, what can you be after on that ice, friend?"

It seemed to him the fox had scented a fish that had broken out of an air hole under another tamarack tree that had floated across the lake in the summer, and now lay stranded on the shallows. In summer months, the oxygen in the water often became so depleted that fish rolled to the surface for relief. When ice formed, the oxygen became even scarcer and the lake trout sometimes vaulted clear out of the air holes and fell upon the ice.

The fox glided to the base of the tree. He climbed into the mass of frost-bound roots and looked down. A fish made a splash in the small space of open water. The fox paid no attention. Cato understood at once that there was something else there that had attracted the fox. Cato narrowed his gaze and began examining the mounds and drifts of snow. He made out a mound near the upper part of the tree, a mound that had too solid a look about it.

He saw that the fox had fixed his eyes and nostrils on that mound. His red tongue lolled. He turned around on the trunk and made his way back to the ice. He began a delicate approach to the mound of snow.

Cato sprang forward. "Hey, you!" At his shout, the fox whirled and ran towards the cedars.

Before he kicked aside the snow covering the buried thing, Cato had figured out what it must be—a deer. He touched his axe lightly against the mount. Teeth of steel snapped and shattered on the axe head. The stranger had shot a doe; he had dragged it across the ice and set traps on the carcass and near it. Cato knew the bounty hunter had done more. He had made balls of meat into which he had thrust pellets of poison. They had been placed at intervals round the deer. When he had finished, he had brushed snow over his boot tracks and had stepped away, covering his tracks as he went. The wind had helped him there. Snow had blown over the traces he had left. He

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had expected that the starving fox, intent upon the venison, would come across the poisoned bait and snap one of them up without a sniff of his nostrils.

Cato knew all about that sort of trickery. He had found sad signs of it the winter before. He set to work, and by examining the snow where it had been trampled he discovered all the baits. He wrapped them in a fold of paper and carried them deep into the forest. Under a pine tree, he kicked open a space in the bed of needles, piled up a bushel of cones and twigs, and made a fire. There he burnt the poison. The fire gave off a stench so strong that he had to back away from it. He gathered more cones and laid them on the flames.

Until then, his anxiety for the ospreys had not stirred his heart. He now thought of them with a happiness all the greater because he had saved the fox from a fearful death, and he stood a while to dream of the ospreys winging over Pennsylvania in the path of the wild geese. He imagined that soon they would be diving into the teeming water down the southern coast.

He stepped briskly away to seek out the other fox traps he believed were in the snow. He had hardly taken a stride before the snowbound silence was shattered by a shriek unlike anything he had ever heard. He ran on to the ice. He looked up and, to his amazement, saw the male osprey wheeling far above the place where the deer lay. He heard his cry ring mournfully—*chewk! chewk!*—in the quiet air. Once more the wailing shriek rang out from the snowdrifts near the fallen tamarack. The sunlight on the snow dazzled Cato. He ran forward and stopped.

He tried to say something, but the dismay in his heart shut off his words. The osprey's mate lay in the snow between the deer and the open water, where a fish rolled. Her wings beat frantically. Even their power could not lift her now. She fell back into a cloud of fanned snowflakes. She lay down, her wings stretched in an ungainly pattern. Again she struggled to her feet and uttered the extraordinary shriek. This time, among the snow crystals, Cato saw drops of blood. She had been caught in a fox trap.

"It's my fault." Sadly he blamed himself for not taking away the other traps before he destroyed the poisoned pellets. He didn't know what to do, but his desire to save her from pain drove him a step nearer, made him call out to her. He learnt at once that this was an error. She struggled violently to rise. He understood that any action by him might frighten her so much that the steel teeth would bite deeper into her. He fell back three paces. She lay quietly.

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A black shadow of wings passed very slowly on the snow at his feet. He didn't look up. The male bird alighted near her. She opened her beak until her red tongue showed. A change in her position showed Cato that the trap had torn her breast when the steel closed on her left leg. Blood seeped into the fine feathers above her talons. In anguish, she struck her beak against the chain. It straightened and sank again into the snow.

Cato walked round the fallen tree and stood hidden from her. He had it in mind to rid her of the dragging trap chain and somehow to free her from the trap itself. The male osprey came closer to his mate and gazed at her, where she lay on the trap, her head bowed to her mottled breast. Often he had stood watching her when she lay in such quietness upon their eggs, intense with new life. That mystery had been one he could share. Into this present mystery he could not enter. To Cato, it seemed that her husband's presence calmed her.

Cato made his way through the boughs until he saw the staple that held the chain to the tree trunk. Using his pocket knife as a lever, he drew the staple out and let the chain fall gently. He had now come so near to her that he saw the constant shuddering of her wings. His pity overcame his caution. He took off his buckskin jacket. In his memory an idea came half formed—that the tribe of falcons stayed quiet if their eyes were hooded. He took a brisk step forward and threw his jacket over her. She never stirred. The other osprey thrashed his wings and clacked his beak in anger.

"I'm doing my best, mister. Hush you now," he crooned.

Cato knelt by the captive bird to listen and to consider. He crossed over to the deer and examined the trap he had sprung. It pleased him that it was an old-fashioned type, one with teeth instead of a single gripping edge. It seemed possible there was a gap in the steel teeth and that her leg might not be broken. He put on the leather gloves he had used in ice-fishing and gently ran his hand along the chain until he touched the trap. It was fastened at either end by small threaded bolts and there were deep slots in the bolt heads. He held one end in his glove until the ice in the slot melted. He thrust the blade of his axe into the slot and turned it open. He did the same thing at the other bolt. The trap came apart. He flung the pieces to one side and drew the jacket over her to keep out the increasing cold.

Because she had not struck at him with beak or talons, he laid his hand on her shin. She trembled in the darkness. He took off his glove and ran his fingers gently along her shin,

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pressing the delicate bone. Blood had frozen over her wounds, but her leg was not broken. He tore a handkerchief into strips and wrapped it round and round the injured part.

"Now, to stand this cold, you must eat. Both of you."

The husband bird, already weakened by hunger, had by nature the same knowledge of her need. She was just as helpless as their young ones had been in the nest. He flew away. Cato watched his kinked wings lift him until the sunlight glittered on the bird's black cheek patches. He could tell that the osprey meant to search the winding channels, and he knew the search would be hopeless, that the osprey would see no open water, except air holes too small for his high plunging.

He cut six fishing holes, a hundred feet apart, baited his hooks and sent them down. There, in summertime, the water lilies bloomed, and under the pads the pickerel lay. While he watched for the first flag to snap up, the osprey appeared overhead. He soared down to stand by his mate. Cato heard him cry *chewk! chewk!* and as before the cry seemed most woeful.

The flag of the third tip-up flew up in the noonday sun. Cato ran there, and he seized the line; he jerked it up to set the hook. The fish surged back and forth, swung into a circling plunge, and tugged. Cato drew it steadily to the rim, where the line had shattered the skim ice. He pulled the fish up smartly and tossed it to one side—a fat, well coloured pickerel. He carried it to the tamarack tree and laid it down by her. He removed his jacket from its place and pushed the pickerel nearer with his boot.

She backed awkwardly away, using only her right leg.

"I tell you it's fresh and good, osprey. Now eat!"

She would not. To such a wild creature, even such a flapping fish had become tainted by the human hand. The other bird shunned the fish, too.

This failure filled Cato with dismay. He had to think things over. He didn't believe the birds could get through the black frost of night unless they ate. He had a few hours of daylight to work out the answer. He knew now that, once aloft, she would have the strength to fly. Even so, he couldn't be sure that she could take a fish if they did follow the geese to the south.

The north wind began to chill him. He put on his jacket. The husband bird stood close to his mate. It seemed to Cato that neither of them had the strength to stand up very long.

"Some hard thinking—and I do declare thinking hurts more than I thought it would." He spoke gravely aloud because it always helped if he put his thoughts into words. "Open water is needed. With fish in it. Live ones."

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He glanced at his tip-up flags. Four signals were flying. "Four fish now. As for open water . . . ah, I see!"

He took up his axe and marked an outline on the ice of a trench ten feet long and five feet wide and to be as deep as the ice would allow. He jumped to it, cutting blocks out, prying them loose and tossing them to one side. In an hour of fast, hard cutting, he had his trench. He drove the axe head through the bottom. Water began to bubble in. When it could rise no more, he hurried off to the tip-ups and took out five more fat fish. He carried them to the trench and placed them in it. They began thrashing around in lively style.

Cato spoke to the male osprey: "Friend, I'm worried lest it not be deep enough for you to dive, but I can do no more."

He returned to the tip-ups, baited the hooks and sent them down again. He turned when he heard the beat of wings. In high hopes, he watched the male osprey fly down the wind, turn into it and fly on to the trench. Instead of rising to dive, he slanted down in a swoop and struck into a fish. He rose and flew to his mate.

She hobbled forward easily and tore hungrily at the fat belly. She ate the whole fish in no time at all. Once free of that fish, the male bird repeated his flight and again presented a fish to her. This time she ate more slowly and her mate joined in the feast.

Cato heard them talking to each other. The burden of his heart began to lift. He rejoiced in his labour and the first fruits of it. He required only one more sign from them. She gave it.

When her mate rose into the sky, she spread her wings and followed. She turned into the wind and swooped towards the open water. Cato saw the white bandage under her wings. She hovered and, with her injured leg held close to her body, she struck with her right talon and took a fish. She flew to their nest and began to eat.

Now her mate rose swiftly towards approaching snow clouds. He folded his wings and fell earthward and again he spread his wings to check his flight. He hovered above the tamarack tree and, in the loud strain of their call, he cried out again and again, wildly varying his cry until it became a song, a long, quavering song of beseechment that she should join him.

She rose from the rim of their nest and flew directly towards him until it seemed to Cato that their wings were touching. They turned towards the setting sun and swiftly winged into its last rose-hued rays.

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To hell with the truth—nobody'd believe it!

PRESENCE OF MIND

BY ANTHONY BURGESS

THE best first thing to do, when you've got a dead body and it's your husband's on the kitchen floor and you don't know what to do about it, is to make yourself a good strong cup of tea. So I put the kettle on and got the tea things down from the shelf, having to st p round Howard to do it. I made myself a really strong pot of tea and I opened a tin of evaporated milk to have with it, more like cream than milk. I don't know why I wanted that instead of milk, normally we just had it with tinned fruit salad, but I felt that I deserved a special cup of tea somehow.

Then I sat down in the living-room, sipping this tea and wondering what was best to do. I should really get dressed and go for the police, but was daft again and saw this sort of picture of the police in the station with the wireless on listening for the football results and checking their coupons and I saw their faces when the telephone rang or I just walked in saying it was urgent. They wouldn't be pleased at all.

Then I thought perhaps I'd better get through to London, Scotland Yard, Whitehall 1212, this being more their line, a dead body in the kitchen, and they were sure not to be checking their coupons. And then I thought that I needed help and somebody to talk this over with, because I could be in a very funny position, I saw that.

The thought of this very funny position made my legs go very weak. I only just saw this very funny position now for the first time as I was pouring myself a second cup and I made the cup rattle against the saucer. Murder. Murder. Murder. But he'd been going to murder me and it was only self-defence what I'd done. You only murder your husband when you hate him and I loved Howard, everybody knew that. Or you murder him when you want his money for yourself or else you want to

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go off with another man. And none of that was true about me.

And then I felt really sick when I remembered about Red, Redvers Glass, and me going off in my mink that time to see him in the hotel and saying I was his sister, and that bitch behind the desk having a good long look at my mink and remembering it. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. And yet it was Red who could help me if anybody could. But where would he be now? Would he be in that hotel? He might even be back in London. The police station would know his address perhaps, but it seemed a bit queer going to the police station to ask for that and saying nothing about me having killed Howard and him lying there on the kitchen floor.

What I did when I'd finished my tea and emptied the teapot and rinsed the cup and saucer and plate on which I'd had a couple of ginger snaps, was to go upstairs and get dressed again. It seemed a bit queer to me now that when I got undressed to die I'd put my clothes (it was a beige costume I was wearing) in the wardrobe very neatly. But that's what I had done and that's what Howard had done too. We were both very neat people really.

I put my beige costume on again and tidied myself up and went downstairs. The light shone down very strongly on poor Howard lying in his pyjamas and dressing-gown on the kitchen floor. He was sort of curled up but his eyes were half-open. Poor Howard. Then I remembered that Howard had locked up the house, back and front, and my front-door key—the one that Red had had when he was staying in the house—had been taken from him by Howard when he'd left the house, and I didn't know where either of the two front-door keys were. I had a long search round and it dawned on me at last that if Howard's idea was to open up the front door as soon as I was snoring away in my last sleep the key would perhaps be on him. And so it was. It was in his dressing-gown pocket and he was lying on it. I had to turn his body on to its back to get into that pocket and the body (I couldn't see it as Howard any more), groaned a bit. I could have hit Howard, he'd been so stupid about everything, and now look what a mess he'd got me into. But Howard was somewhere else and there was this big lump of a body, very heavy and difficult to move.

I put my mink on and went out.

My idea was to go to the Swinging Lamp first of all, to see if Red was there or if he'd left an address or anything, so I walked quickly—it was very cold—towards the bus stop for town. And then who should I meet walking along very slowly and heavy

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footed but this very policeman who'd been to our house twice before and both times with Red. It was under a lamp, the bus stop, and I'd just reached it when this copper said, in a very proud way, "I reckon yer've ad noah more trooble, ave yer, missis? With im, I mean. Haw haw haw."

"Who?" I said. "What?"

"That pawit chap as was botherin yer. E's bin oop ere again this evenin an I sent im back. Threatened im with chargin im with disturbin the peace, we did. Haw haw." This policeman was very pleased with himself.

"Where is he?" I asked. "I've got to find him." I had to think fast of a reason why I'd got to and find him so I said, "He's got our front-door key."

"As, as e? Well, we cawn't ave that, missis. Well, ah saw im arf an hour ago gaw inter the Stag an Ounds and av not sin im coom out yet."

The Stag and Hounds was a pub Howard and I never went into because it was a bit rough. But it was a pub I'd have to go into tonight. So I thanked this copper and went off to the Stag and Hounds which was off Shoe Lane. I didn't much fancy going in there but it was very early in the evening and the pub wouldn't long have been open so there wouldn't be many drunks there. So off I went.

It wasn't much of a walk, really. And there was the Stag and Hounds with a light shining on its signboard, this showing a stag's head and one or two dogs barking up at it. I went into the saloon bar and there were three men there drinking light ale and talking in an angry sort of way about the afternoon's football. They turned when I looked in to give me a good long stare so I made a sort of face at them and went out, Red not being there. I went round the corner into the public bar where women were not supposed to go, and there I was very relieved to see Red sitting at a table with a pint in front of him and he was talking very hard to this other one, the one who'd written about the coal mines and how he wasn't going to have that sort of life, no sir: Higgins was the name I remembered. There were only a couple of young lads playing darts besides Red and Higgins, so I went straight up to Red, whose head was turned away from me with his talking, and I tapped him on the shoulder. He looked surprised and a bit relieved to see me.

I said, "Come with me, I've got something to tell you. It's very urgent."

He said, "Sit down, have a drink, you look cold."

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But I said, " This can't wait, it's very urgent, we can't talk in here."

And so he excused himself to Higgins, who looked scruffy as hell, if you don't object to the expression, and downed what was left of his pint of beer and came outside with me. And as we walked back towards our house, I tried to break it very gently to him what had happened. He hadn't got an overcoat on, and he shivered a bit and he walked a bit too fast for me, but when it had dawned on him what had happened he suddenly stopped and said, " Good God."

" Good God nothing," I said.

And then we passed near this copper who went, " Haw haw, found im, ave yer? I'll be around, missis, never fear."

After that we sort of bounded to our house and I opened the front door and switched on the hall light. I hoped in a way that the body of Howard might have sort of disappeared by magic while I was out, but it was still there on the floor.

Red looked a bit pale and kept saying, " Good God," over and over again. Then he said, " You'll have to have the police, you'll just have to. And this is what you hit him with, is it?" He was handling this coal hammer and sort of swinging it in his hand. " Very nasty, very nasty indeed." You could see he didn't watch the TV very much, or go to the pictures much either, for he was covering this coal hammer handle with finger-prints. I'd cleaned mine off, of course, with the tea towel, which is what you're supposed to do if you kill somebody.

I said, " It's all right you talking about going for the police, but what are the police going to say? They're going to say that we had a quarrel or something and I did him in. They're not going to believe any of that about him wanting to do himself in but do me in first, are they? That stands to reason. And all this is not fair and a lot of trouble's been caused by Howard's silly ideas. Anyway, he's dead, and that's what he wanted. To die, that is. Not quite this way, but it's done the job the same as the other way would have done, not that that was my intention. To call the police in is going to cause a lot of trouble."

" I'd better do it," said Red, very loud and nervous and still clutching this hammer in his right hand. " I'd better ask that policeman out there on the road to come in."

" You'll cop it worse than I will," I said, " you mark my words. There you are with that hammer with all your finger-prints on and none of mine, me having done the correct thing." He dropped the hammer with a clang on the floor and then started wiping his hands all over his pullover. " And the police already

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suspicious," I said, "and you have written that poem too about dying in a good cause and so on."

"That's silly," said Red. "What cause would I have to do him in? Besides, I've got alibis for earlier on. This is a lot of nonsense, this is, and I'm getting out of here."

"Alibis nothing," I said. "It might be now you killed him, mightn't it? I could go out screaming all about it, couldn't I?" And the silly idiot had still got his fingerprints all over the hammer. "They couldn't prove it wasn't now he was done in, could they?" Then I went sort of weak. "Oh, Red," I said, "I'm so miserable. I want help." And, God forgive me, what I wouldn't have minded then was a bit of love, God help the lot of us.

"The truth," Red was sort of yelling, and there was sweat on his face even though it was so cold, I still had my mink on; it was perishing in that kitchen. "The truth can't harm the innocent," he yelled. "Tell the truth, get the police in and tell them the truth. The truth won't do you any harm, the truth is your only way. The truth." He sounded like somebody on a street corner with a soap-box selling magazines.

But I wasn't wasting my breath now, I was thinking very hard, and while I was thinking and Red was going on about the truth, I gave the coal hammer a bit of a kick and it went straight under the electric cooker, our model not having a warming drawer at the bottom but little legs, and there was a bit of space between the oven part of the cooker and the floor. Red didn't see me do that or hear it either, he was going on so about the truth. But I thought to hell with the truth because nobody would believe the the truth. The thing was that I'd got to organise things so that there'd be no trouble for me, for I didn't deserve trouble, God knows I'd had enough.

In a little while Red calmed down a bit and said, "Well, I warned everybody, didn't I? I warned the police and everybody about what was going to happen. They should have listened to me, *you* should have listened to me, but nobody would listen to me, they all thought I was mad."

"The thing is," I said, "what's to be done with poor Howard's body?" The funny part was that Howard lying dead there on the floor, I couldn't sort of feel any sorrow or anything and I knew that would come later when this body was out of the way. "We just can't leave the body lying here," I said.

Red said, "Leave me out of it, it's nothing to do with me, I don't want anything to do with it or any part of it, I just want to be left out of it."

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By now my brain was working very quickly, very cool, real cool, man, silly old idiot he'd been, and I said, "Your fingerprints are all over that hammer and you don't know where that hammer is."

He said, "Where is it, where is it, what have you done with it, where have you hidden it?"

"It's in this kitchen," I said, "and while you're looking for it I'll just go out and bring in that copper. Nice that'll be, won't it, you on your knees looking for that hammer and a copper coming in to see this dead body and you all in a dither as you are. Come on," I said, "play it real cool." Stupid of me. Red wasn't all that bright, really, you could see that. He was all right in bed, and that was about all, but I suppose you have to be thankful for small mercies. "I've got a cheque book," I said, "with all Howard's signatures on it. If I go to the bank on Monday morning I can draw out this fifty-odd thousand quid can't I?"

"How much?" said Red.

I had to tell him again.

"I don't like this one little bit," said Red.

"You will," I said. "And there's nothing to feel guilty about, really. Howard didn't want his money and he wanted to die. So there's nothing to feel guilty about."

"What are you going to do?" asked Red.

"We could go abroad," I said, "taking Howard with us. I've got some lovely new luggage. There's a lovely big trunk we never used. Howard can go in that. Before he gets stiff, that is." I was handling this real cool, that's really the only expression you can think of.

"I don't like this one little bit," said Red again.

"Oh, come off it," I said.

I'd really taken over now. I was really in charge and I was quite enjoying it. I was only wishing that things could get moving a bit faster, what with tomorrow being Sunday and nowhere open. And then that fool Howard had invited Myrtle and Michael to tea. Well, they shouldn't come. It had been no idea of mine. Tomorrow morning first thing I'd go round and tell them that Howard was taking me out for the day as a kind of day-after-my-birthday treat and they could come to tea some other time.

Oh, poor stupid Howard, I kept thinking, when later on Red and I were stuffing him into his lovely big pigskin-covered trunk. He went in very nicely, doubled up of course.

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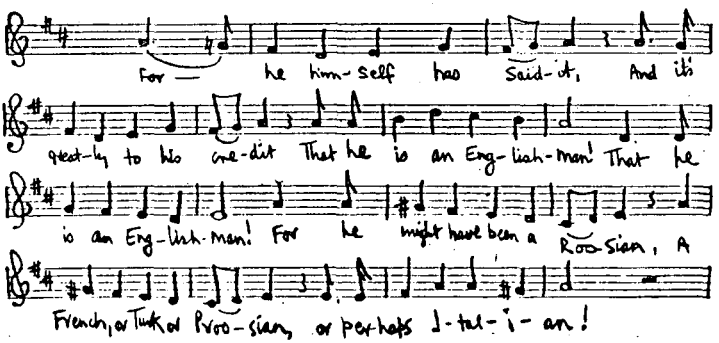
For — he him-self has said-it, And it's
great-ly to his cre-dit That he is an Eng-lish-man! That he
is an Eng-lish-man! For he might have been a Rus-sian, A
French, or Turk or Prus-sian, or perhaps I-tal-i-an!

US

Continental people have sex life; the English have hot-water bottles.

GEORGE MIKES

London at Sunset

. . . into St. James's Park, where we were first accosted by the English bulbs. Great banks of them, in graded heights, stood under the plane trees ; tulips like cupped hands ; tulips like sacrificial fires ; tulips like swans' breasts ; so many colours, but all alike in the shape of aspiration.

. . . I led my guest to the bridge over the lake. There we stopped, gazing first from one balustrade, then from the other. Into the sunset we stared, taking as a single symphony of colour the whole western sky and the world beneath it. Buckingham Palace behind, the island with its Japanese willows weeping into the lake in the foreground. And along the banks long beds of iris in flower. Eastward, up the lake, a family of ducks in shot-silk coats paddled toward the upper island, behind which rose an absurd fairyscape of domes, minarets and towers. Every visitor to London knows that scene, especially on a summer evening when the last light floods that chance grouping of buildings . . .

RICHARD CHURCH, *Green Tide*

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Base, Black and Nasty

Coffee, as used on the Continent, serves the double purpose of an agreeable tonic and an exhilarating beverage, without the unpleasant effects of wine.

Coffee, as drunk in England, debilitates the Stomach, and produces a slight nausea. In Italy it is made strong from the best Coffee, and is poured out hot and transparent.

In England it is usually made from bad Coffee, served out tepid and muddy, and drowned in a deluge of water, and sometimes deserves the title given it as "a base, black, thick, nasty, bitter, stinking Puddle Water."

WILLIAM KITCHINER, M.D., *The Cook's Oracle*, 1838

Every Englishman wears a mackintosh, and has a cap on his head and a newspaper in his hand. As for the Englishwoman, she carries a mackintosh or a tennis racket. Nature here has a propensity for unusual shagginess, excrescences, woolliness, spikiness and all kinds of hair; English horses, for example, have regular tufts and tassels of hair on their legs, and English dogs are nothing more or less than absurd bundles of forelocks. Only the English lawn and the English gentleman are shaved every day . . .

KAREL CAPEK, *Letters from England*

Countess of Buckenburgh said that the English women did not look like Women of Quality but made themselves look as pitifully and sneakingly as they could; that they hold their Heads down and look always in a Fright whereas those that are Foreigners hold up their Heads and hold out their Breasts and make themselves look as great and stately as they can, and more nobly and more like Quality than the others. To which Lady Deloraine replied: "We show our Quality by our Births and Titles, Madam, and not by sticking out our Bosoms."

MARY, COUNTESS COWPER, *Diary*, 1715

That Which I Am

If I could take my England, and could wring
One living moment from her simple year,
One moment only, whether of place or time,
—One winter coppice feathery with rime,
One shred of dawn in spring,—
Then should my voice find echo in English ear;
Then might I say, "That which I love, I am."

V. SACKVILLE-WEST

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Advice to Visitors

Voices must not be raised
unless supporting a sport,
or aiding the deaf or dazed,

but to whisper in company,
unless in a bank or church,
exposes one's pedigree.

At cricket one gently applauds
whoever is doing his best—
this is the charm of Lord's.

F. PRATT GREEN

No love, No nothing . . .

The most characteristic English play on the subject of physical love is Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. It is characteristic because it has no love scenes. The English, as their drama represents them, are a nation endlessly communicative about love without ever enjoying it. Full-blooded physical relationships engaged in with mutual delight are theatrically tabu. Thwarted love is preferred, the kind Mr. Coward wrote about in *Brief Encounter*, where two married people (married, of course, to two other people), form a sad and meagre attachment without being able to follow it through. At the end of a play on some quite different subject—religion, perhaps, or politics—it is customary for the hero to say, as he does in *Robert's Wife*: " I was deeply in love with a fine woman," and for the wife to reply: " My dear, dear husband "; but there should be no hint elsewhere in the text that they have as much as brushed lips.

KENNETH TYNAN, *Curtains*

. . . Instead

When it comes to publications by the Society's Staff and Research writers, our zoological scholars are in a class on their own.

Who but the British could write on " The exploitation of the milk ejection reflex by primitive peoples," " The social structure of the red avadavat with particular reference to clumping and social preening," and " The development of the mouse blastocysts transplanted to the spleen "?

The pure technical joy of it all makes me want to clump and preen.

CASSANDRA, *Daily Mirror*, 28 *July*, 1964

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"It's costing you a hundred thousand . . ."

THE COLONEL CALLS

BY JACQUES GILLIES

HE left the Rolls-Royce without a backward glance at the chauffeur and stood for a moment looking up at the silent, sun-warmed front of the City and Colonial Bank. For a man who would shortly be in illegal possession of a hundred thousand pounds he felt remarkably calm.

Without turning his head he was conscious of a woman in smoked glasses coming down the steps. She was tucking a cheque-book in her shoulder-bag and her eyes widened slightly as she saw him. Then she was sliding into a sports car, drawing up her long pale legs like a praying mantis. She sat for a moment with an unlit cigarette between her lips and his hand half rose to his pocket but fell back regretfully. He crossed the pavement, turning back the flap of his pigskin glove to glance at his watch. It was twenty-four and a half minutes past eleven. He was dead on time.

As he went up the steps the sports car drew noisily away, sending up a flock of pigeons. Inside there were two tellers on duty and he crossed to the nearest, taking a card from a silver case.

He said, "Will you ask Mr. Fordyce if he can spare me a moment?" and almost immediately turned his back to look around critically. He heard the man murmur something to the chief clerk, and then a door open at the rear. After a minute the chief clerk came back to a door in the partition. He was a defeated man with a battery of ballpoints in his pocket.

Smiling deferentially he said, "Will you come this way, Colonel Gore-Hepburn?"

"Thank you," the Colonel said stiffly.

He walked along the corridor behind the clerk and into a sun-splashed office where Fordyce was standing at his desk holding the card. He waited until the door had closed before he went forward, drawing off his glove.

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" Fordyce? " he said, and when they'd shaken hands he added, " I sent in my private card because I didn't want anyone to know what interests I represent until we know something about your facilities here in Haverton." He walked casually on as he was speaking and showed himself for a moment at the window.

Moving back he saw Fordyce relaxing, his eyes innocent and ready to please behind steel-rimmed spectacles. " Of course, Colonel, you'd have to explain in a little more detail . . ." He stopped as his outside phone rang shrilly. With his hand on it he added, " Will you excuse me . . .? "

When he raised the receiver the Colonel was close enough to hear the child wailing in monotonous terror before Fordyce's wife said in a low, urgent voice, " Do anything they say, Alec . . . please . . . for God's sake . . ."

As the manager's eyes widened with horror, the Colonel leaned forward and cut him off. His face was fish-cold. " Don't do anything. Don't move, don't speak, or they'll die."

" Oh my God! " He was stupid with shock, his knuckles white around the phone. " But you can't . . ."

" Shut up! It's a hold-up. They'll die unless you listen."

The creases around Fordyce's mouth were suddenly filled with sweat, the receiver rolled with a thump on to the blotting pad. Slowly the Colonel replaced it. " Your wife has an electrode clipped to each ear," he said, without expression. " If they turn on the current, believe me, the pain is indescribable. She'd recover—physically. But as for her mind . . ."

" What . . . do you want? "

" Oh—just some money." The Colonel went to the window again and looked down at Wallace standing by the car. When he turned round he saw the manager's hands convulsed on the desk.

Fordyce said, " You filthy swine—"

The Colonel went back to him, zipping open his document case. He said, " Now listen carefully. It's going to take about fifteen minutes, that's all. But if you don't co-operate, then—" Gently he took the lobes of his ears between finger and thumb.

Fordyce turned his head, shuddering.

" Get a hold on yourself! The first step is to get your chief clerk in here. You'll explain that I'm from the head office of Home and Mercantile who carry your insurance, and that I'm having a check on the security of your branches in the south-west. After we've spoken for a moment or two you will invite me to stay the night with you. I shall seem undecided, but in the meantime I'll ask if I can leave my things here and you'll tell him to bring them in. Now repeat that! "

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Fordyce opened his mouth, closed it again. His eyes flickered.

" Repeat it! " The Colonel slammed the desk with his glove. Fordyce repeated it in an unsteady whisper.

"All right." As the Colonel glanced at his watch again, the town clock struck the half hour. In the wake of the dinning notes a horse clip-clopped up the quiet street. Fordyce dabbed his face with a handkerchief before lifting the internal phone.

A moment later the head clerk tapped at the door and came in. While he stood there blinking, Fordyce said hesitantly, " Oh—Colonel Gore-Hepburn is from the Home and Mercantile Insurance, Pearson. He's checking on our security."

The Colonel leaned back in his chair and said crisply, " Sorry to jump on you like this, Pearson, but it's the only way I can see if people are really on their toes."

" I hope you'll find everything in order, sir."

" Frankly, I think I've caught you on the hop." The Colonel smiled bleakly. " I walk in here, pass a card over the counter, and in two minutes I'm left alone with Fordyce. I could have shoved a gun in his ribs as soon as the door closed."

Pearson moistened his lips. " If I may say so, sir, you don't look very like a hold-up man."

The Colonel stood up and leaned impressively over the back of his chair. " You people in the provinces must really stop thinking like that. Nowadays we don't know what the beggars'll look like—eh, Fordyce? "

Fordyce shook his head. The gleam of sweat had come back to his lip again. " Will you be staying the night, Colonel? My wife and I . . . would be very pleased to put you up."

The Colonel looked at his watch. " Depends how things go—I'd like to push on if possible. Look here—do you mind if I dump my stuff here until I decide? My driver wants to take the car off and have something done."

Fordyce said woodenly, " No, of course not. Perhaps you'd tell the Colonel's driver to bring his things in here, Pearson."

" Yes, Mr. Fordyce." The door closed behind him.

" Not quite an Oscar performance," the Colonel said coolly. "A little more eagerness to please me, Fordyce, or else—" His hand hovered towards the phone—" I shall arrange a small scream to refresh your memory."

As Fordyce flinched, the Colonel looked at a paper in his case. "According to my information the vault is underneath. It has the usual fire-proof doors, electrically operated. Is that correct? "

Fordyce nodded.

" How are the doors opened? "

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" I have a key; Pearson has another. You need them both."

" I see." The Colonel paused as Pearson and the chauffeur entered. They put down three cases and a zipped duffel bag. The Colonel said, "Thank you, Wallace. Don't be long in case I decide to push on."

The chauffeur saluted as he left. The door was closing on Pearson when the Colonel added, " By the way, we'll need you in a moment, Pearson. I want to look at the layout down below."

Pearson nodded. " Very well, sir."

When the door had closed, the Colonel walked to the window again. " We're a minute and a half ahead of time."

Fordyce turned his head, letting his breath go. " You don't know what . . . this is costing me."

" It's costing you about a hundred thousand pounds, Fordyce."

Fordyce blinked, looked away. " I'm afraid you will be disappointed. In a small branch like Haverton we don't carry anything like that amount."

" Take off your glasses, Fordyce." The Colonel walked back calmly.

" What for—what do you want now . . ."

" Take them off."

As Fordyce unhooked them he said, " I can't see without—" His voice died in a gasp as the Colonel hit him hard over each temple with a gloved hand.

" There are two component factories and a subsidiary of Birmingham Chemicals on the by-pass. All of them draw their wages here tomorrow. Your current holdings shown in the head office return last week were eighty-nine thousand pounds. We've been a year setting this up and there isn't a detail about the branch which isn't known to me. Put your glasses on again—you look ridiculous."

As Fordyce hooked them clumsily over his ears, the Colonel went on, " Now listen carefully, because if you make one mistake from now on, you won't see your family again. Not in their right minds, anyhow. Have you any large withdrawals notified for this morning? "

" No. I don't think so."

" Very well. When we go below you will tell Pearson that if anyone comes in unexpectedly wanting one, he is to ask him to come back in an hour. He can say you're having an audit or something. Is that clear? "

" Yes, I understand."

" In the interests of your wife's health you would be wise to tell me whether there is anything I have overlooked."

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Fordyce hesitated. " There's a magic-eye alarm on the staircase. It's controlled by a concealed switch at the top. You'd be expected to know about it."

" Thank you, Fordyce. You're learning sense." He went over to the window again. After a pause he said suddenly, " You know, I'll remember this view all my life. Will you ring for Pearson now . . .?

"All set, Pearson? Splendid. Lead on, Fordyce." As they went out on to the staircase he added, " You have a magic-eye device here, haven't you? "

Fordyce murmured, " Yes, Colonel," and bent to flick the small switch in the skirting. They walked down the concrete steps under the white glare of a ceiling light and the Colonel watched while they each fitted their keys in turn. Then Fordyce pressed a gate switch at the side and the doors rolled silently apart.

The Colonel's footsteps rang as he walked slowly in and paced the length of the vault, looking critically at the old ledgers, deed boxes and cabinets. " The stuff you keep in these places . . ." His voice echoed. He walked back and unhooked a stock board from the wall. Letting the pages drift under his eyes he said, " While I check things down here you'd better switch off the general alarm, Pearson, and lock us in. That's the usual form. Leave us access to Mr. Fordyce's office in case we want to refer to anything."

" Very good, sir."

As he turned to go, Fordyce said uncertainly, " Oh, and Pearson, if anyone comes in for a large withdrawal tell them to come back in an hour or two. Say we're having an audit or something."

"All right, Mr. Fordyce." His footsteps clattered up the stairs. The Colonel and Fordyce faced each other watchfully while he locked first the door from the general office and then the outer door of Fordyce's room.

Then the Colonel said softly, "All right, Fordyce, let's hurry. We bring the cases down here."

They went hurriedly up the steps, shoulder to shoulder, and picked up the Colonel's luggage. In less than half a minute they were back again, and the Colonel was kneeling on the floor, pulling out old books and blankets. " Open the cabinets," he said crisply over his shoulder.

Fordyce moved like a man in a dream, unlocking them and rolling out the drawers.

" The pounds first," the Colonel ordered. " Twenty thousand

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in the big cases, ten thousand each in the small case and the duffel bag. Hurry, man!" They went swiftly to and fro, their breathing accelerated.

"Now the fivers—fill every corner." When the cases were packed he knelt on them to snap the locks.

Together they lifted them outside. Fordyce closed the gate switch and the doors rolled together. "It's automatic locking," he muttered.

When they put the cases down again in the office, the Colonel arranged them fastidiously, the way they had been before. Still bent, he said ironically, "You've been a great help, Fordyce."

Fordyce leaned on the desk, his spectacles hanging limply from his hand. He watched the Colonel pass to the window and look down.

"Good, the car's back." He looked at his watch. "Give Pearson the all clear."

When Fordyce didn't move he snatched up the receiver and held it out. "Remember Mrs. Fordyce."

After Fordyce had hung up they heard the key turn in the lock. Pearson put his head in to say, "All right, sir?"

The Colonel smiled.

"I'm giving you a clean ticket, Pearson."

"I'm glad of that, sir."

The Colonel stood up. "Quicker than I thought—with any luck I'll get one more call in today. You might have my bags taken out to the car again."

"Of course, Colonel."

Pearson picked up two of the bags and as he went through the door they heard him call to one of the tellers. After they'd both gone the Colonel said softly, "No one is to go to the vaults or give the alarm for half an hour, Fordyce—that is when my people have orders to release your wife. This place is being watched. They'll know right away if anything goes wrong."

"How do I know they'll . . ."

"Why not?" The Colonel shrugged. "You will walk out with me now and say good-bye at the front door. I ask you to remember that we mean business." He clenched a hand, stretching the glove tight. "You must behave naturally. All right, open the door."

Fordyce went slowly across and held it and the Colonel swept by him, tucking his document case under his arm. In the vestibule he gripped Fordyce's hand.

"First-class branch, Fordyce—be a pretty clever fellow who-ever robs you here."

The next moment he was swinging down the steps and entering

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the car. Then the door slammed, and the car slid noiselessly away.

Fordyce was turning back when Pearson said excitedly at his elbow, " We guessed what had happened, Mr. Fordyce—Miss Pringle's trying to get the police now! "

" Stop! " shouted Fordyce in an agonised voice. He flung himself on the counter by the switchboard girl. " Don't call them, for God's sake! "

The girl turned a white face and jerked the plug free. " I . . . I hadn't said anything, Mr. Fordyce. They were waiting to put me through."

" We have to wait . . ." He turned a ravaged face to Pearson. " They've got my wife and child . . . In half an hour it will be all right." He walked slowly down the short corridor into his office. He was conscious of the staff crowding the doorway behind him.

Dazedly he heard Pearson say, " I was on the blower to head office and I mentioned the Colonel was here. They said it was most unusual and when we checked with the Home and Mercantile we found the real Colonel was still in his office."

Harvill, a junior teller, said, " The main thing is he didn't get anything, Mr. Fordyce."

" But you don't understand! " Fordyce raised his head. " It was in the cases . . . you carried it out for him."

Pearson shook his head. " That was after we'd rung head office. We emptied the cases on the way through, sir."

" You *what*? "

" It's true, sir," Harvill said. " We used nearly everything in the stationery cupboard to fill them up again. We would have tried to stop him, only we were afraid he might have been holding a gun on you."

Fordyce sank into his chair. When he looked up Pearson said, " Do you think your wife and boy will be all right, sir? "

" I think so," he said wearily.

While they all waited on, silently, a mutton-faced man suddenly put his head round the door.

" Hey, can I get some service here? You're asking for a robbery, you lot are! "

© Jacques Gillies 1960

OFF WITH HIS BEARD!

" Usyng or havyng a greate berde of more notable prolyxitie or length than the said Cytezens of this Cytie do now use or have hertofore of late yares usyd to ware," is according to this 1542 decree of the City of London still an offence. The judge of " prolyxitie " appears to be the Lord Mayor.

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TO WALK IN HONOUR

By

ARTHUR MAYSE

IT was a seal hauling itself ashore, Max Crowell thought for a moment. Then the shape resolved itself into a human figure, toy-tiny, wading out of the shallows. It did not flaw the solitude of the tide flats; even, somehow it intensified their shimmering emptiness. Presently, Max eased his shoulders away from the log of driftwood and reached for his binoculars.

A girl in a blue swimsuit . . . running now . . . racing in across the sands. He adjusted the focus and brought her face sharp and clear into the circle of the lenses.

She's running from something—the feeling slid quietly across his mind. He was a newspaperman, had been for a year. Even on holiday he remained, a trifle self-consciously, a reporter.

The following thought, the question, was inevitable. Why? What was she running from, here?

He got up with the glasses dangling on his chest, and sauntered

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out to the foreshore. The girl was much closer. Gulls, startled from their foraging, planed above and around her, lending a virginal nimbus. She stopped running when she saw him. They approached each other slowly, drawing together in the wide loneliness, under a domed sky heat-rimmed with bronze.

The girl stopped and bent down. When she straightened, live silver glinted on her palm.

"What's that?" Max halted too, a tide pool winking blue between them.

"Needlefish." She did not return his smile.

His acquaintance with salt water was slight, his home three thousand miles east of this wild British Columbia beach. He said to her, puzzled, "But you picked it out of the sand."

"They dig in when the tide leaves them. When the sand dries they flop out."

"Is that what the gulls get so excited about?"

She nodded and, bending, let the little green-and-silver fish slip from her fingers into the pool.

"The gulls won't like that," Max said to her.

She didn't answer. He strolled beside her towards the rugged foreshore with its gale-piled driftwood. She was young—eighteen, he judged, give or take a year—and small, her head not much past his shoulder. Her hair, a lighter brown than his, was already drying into a cap of curls. He glanced at her and realised that she was not quite a stranger. He had danced with her once at a yacht club party in Vancouver, and kissed her once, but he had not asked her name. The kiss had been a casual tribute to youth and April and a pretty girl under a flowering tree, and he had surrendered her with a twinge of regret, knowing it unlikely their ways would cross again. That meeting had been well over a year ago. Obviously she didn't remember.

"If you've nothing better to do," he said to her, "will you join me in a round of beachcombing?" He made the invitation casual, smiling at her. But she quickened her pace, was drawing away from him.

"Thanks, no, I have work to do at home."

"Tomorrow, maybe?"

"Not tomorrow either."

"I wish you would . . ." He said to her awkwardly, "Look, I'm not trying to be fresh. It's just that I'd like to be friends."

The girl turned her head. "Why?" Although her voice remained level, it held the tautness of a straining cord. Her eyes were grey as a winter sea, and no warmer.

"Why does anyone want to be friends?" It was a weak.

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temporising answer, but time was what he needed. "Because I like you, I suppose."

"*Because I like you,*" she mimicked, and her mouth twisted. "Would you get it into your head that I don't want friends?"

"Possibly. But I'd still try—" He had his own stubborn pride, and an adolescent hangover of sensitivity that occasionally annoyed him—"even though there doesn't seem much hope . . ."

"None whatever." Something in her voice, a quality more subtle and infinitely more bitter than anger, stopped him.

He turned and studied her, frowning still, but with his own anger gone. "I'm sorry," he said. "My name's Maxton Crowell. I'm staying with my aunt and uncle along the coast. And if you'll overlook a false start, I'd still like to be friends."

Her steady gaze weighed and considered him. "On my terms?"

"Any terms you name."

They picked their way, barefoot and flinching, among the barnacled rocks that sloped down from high-tide mark. Max offered his hand for a rough crossing, but the girl ignored it.

"I'm Deborah Palmer," she said to him over a brown shoulder. "If you want to beachcomb, I suppose my ironing can wait."

"Deb?"

"Debby."

"My friends call me Max."

"I know." He gave her a startled glance and she added, "One of the Ontario rowing crew called you that."

He was pleased, and said to her warmly, "I never thought you'd remember. You were wearing a white dress, strapless, full skirt. The boy with you had red hair. I got the impression you were very happy."

"What a memory," she said. "You amaze me." Her mouth smiled, but the smile failed to touch her eyes. "As a matter of fact, you're right."

"April, wasn't it? I remember a tree, flowering plum, I think." He sensed the sudden wariness, the locking of her face.

She said, "My memory isn't as good as that."

He glanced down and was reassured. No ring on that small brown hand. "What happened to that red-haired fellow?"

"We stopped seeing each other." It came out crisply. "Perhaps you'd like to help me find some juniper wood. My father makes things from it. Flower holders, lamp bases, things like that."

"I will, gladly. Except I wouldn't know juniper if you hit me with it."

They roved a quarter of a mile of beach, teetering on giant

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logs, stepping down to poke in the smaller litter of the chaotic North Pacific drift. Debby, well ahead, sank to her knees, tugging and burrowing. The twisted, yard-long chunk she uncovered was silver-grey, honeycombed where rot and abrasion had eaten out the softer fibres. The sound parts carried a curving grain, rose-streaked, a natural art form.

"This is juniper," Debby said and moved on, swinging the fragment, her feet sure in the drift logs.

Max unearthed a chunk of his own soon afterwards. He called, "Hey, wait!" and the girl let him plod up to her.

Her lips smiled. "Western red cedar," she told him.

He said baffled, "Some difference. How can you tell?"

"Several ways. This is the surest." Her hair, as she turned, brushed lightly against his jaw. "Have you a knife, Max? And a match?"

He produced both, watching while Debby freed a splinter from the length she had found. She lit the sliver, shook out the flame and passed it to him with smoke curling from the blackened end. "Smell."

He did, and it was a fragrance he was to remember always—a scent keyed to the love and hate and grief of this, the true summer of his coming of age—a pungent incense.

"I get it." He grinned at her where she balanced on her log. "I am now knowledgeable about juniper. At least till I run out of matches."

Her home, he learnt as they jogged on round the easy curve of the shore, was past the next headland. Most days, she swam and explored up there, where the coastline was wilder still, and even lovelier. Max offered to carry their cargo to her house, but she refused. "My mother hasn't been very well. If she saw me with a—stranger, she'd worry."

"Still a stranger, Debby?" An odd girl, he thought. Three hours in her company and he still couldn't make her out.

"I didn't mean it like that." They had halted, close in to the dark rock of the point. "Thanks for the morning, Max."

The smile was there, but not in her eyes, never in those wide sea-grey eyes with the very faint violet smudges of weariness or recent illness shadowing them. "And thanks for being my friend."

"Now that I'm a seasoned juniper hound we could do this again." His own eyes were hazel, sun-squinted in a tanned, homely face. The invitation was carefully offhand, made as he added his single stick of juniper to her three. "Tomorrow, Debby? We could take lunch, make a day of it."

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"Sorry. I'm not sure I'll be here tomorrow. Good-bye, Max."

"May I ask one question before you go?"

"I'd much sooner you didn't."

"All right then." He kept his tone light, reminding himself she meant nothing in his life, but making a token try. "I'll save it till next time, Debby."

"Don't count on any next time." She turned, and he watched her walk on into the shadow of the point, a small girl, straight-backed and slight, the loneliness in her a barrier that subtly, stubbornly defied him.

The newspaperman's question he hadn't asked—one of the questions—stayed with him, haunting him like the sharp incense of juniper. Who, what, was she running from? Where was she running, and why?

His cousins had planned a beach party, but Max skipped it, saying he had to write an overdue letter to his father at home in Toronto. It was deep dusk when he wandered out to the seaward-fronting verandah where his aunt and uncle, both plump, both amiably placid, spent the evening in wicker chairs. Max pulled a chair alongside his aunt's and settled in it.

"Well, Mister Sober-sides?" His aunt's spectacles glimmered at him. It was a question as well as a greeting. Off and on he had been taking out an arrestingly pretty honey-blonde, and he was aware that his relatives had been watching that piece of summer nonsense, evanescent as beach-fire smoke, with the indulgent interest of late middle age.

"They've had a quarrel, Edna. It's plain to see." His uncle spoke comfortably round his pipe, his feet propped on the verandah railing. "Don't let it get you, laddy. She and me used to battle all the time."

Max had come there to deliver a station wagon to his Uncle Arthur from the big agency which his father, Arthur's elder brother, had built out of a run-down secondhand car firm. They had invited him to finish his holiday at their summer cottage.

There was no reason he should be reluctant to ask them about the girl on the lonely beach. Still, he edged into it carefully. "Matter of fact I ran into another girl today. A very nice kid. I met her last year when we were out here rowing against the University of B.C. She lives round that second point—Madrona, isn't it?"

He sensed the change. His aunt stirred in her chair. His uncle sucked his dead pipe, his movements deliberate.

"That," his uncle said, "would be Debby Palmer."

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"We've never met the Palmers socially," his aunt said. "Of course, we've run into them—the parents, that is—shopping at Cameron Bay. But they're three miles away, not what you'd call neighbours."

"Keep pretty much to themselves," his uncle supplemented, "I understand he was in a bank on the mainland before he retired last spring."

Silence thickened on the dim verandah. Max let it become uncomfortable, waiting for his uncle to break it.

The older man spoke at last, after a gruff clearing of his throat. "Mind, I'm not saying she isn't a fine girl. She most likely is. But I'd keep away from her if I were you, Max."

"Any special reason, Uncle Arthur?"

"Well, the simple fact is that Debby Palmer managed to land herself in a pretty ugly mess. There was some talk after the Palmers moved here in July that she'd had a try at suicide. Car in a closed garage, engine running—that sort of thing."

Max waited, his thoughts held in careful, rigid suspension. His uncle went on again in the same gruff, embarrassed tone, "All in all, Max, I doubt if she's a very healthy person for a young man to pal up with. I expect your Dad would agree. I'd just give that one a bye." He slapped an ankle with unnecessary vigour. "Blasted mosquitoes! Let's go in, Edna."

Max stayed. The moon was up now, blood-red from some bush fire to the north, and the beach party had reached the singing stage. For a moment, frowning, he wished strongly that he were down there with his cousins, the summer crowd, the uncomplicated honey-blonde. He didn't know what he had blundered into on the lonely beach, and he was glad his uncle hadn't dressed Debby Palmer's trouble in details.

As a newspaperman he was, or believed himself to be, a tough-minded realist. In a year he had moved up from obituaries to police reporting. He knew most of the answers. Today, round the point, he had strayed into a climate of enchantment; the logical move, for the remainder of his holiday, was to keep away from there.

He knew now what he had sensed that morning, while her eyes froze him and her curt voice warned him away. It had been a cry for help, a wordless and desperate reaching. But he had no wish to be involved in Debby Palmer's grief, whatever it might be. A man would be a fool to get mixed up with a potential suicide.

If his uncle and aunt guessed where he was bound for next morning, they didn't comment. He ambled along the exposed

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tide flats—empty this time, bald as the face of the moon—with lunch enough for two in a rucksack. He was carefully shaved, and his flannels were more reputable-looking than yesterday's jeans. With the sun ten o'clock high, he clambered over Madrona Point. Only one house showed beyond it; long, white and low, with a startling emerald lawn sloping to a cove where a yellow boat rode at moorings, twin outboard motors cocked on its transom.

He took a breather there, putting his own thoughts in order. What he wanted, and all he wanted, was to understand certain convictions arrived at last night. She was a very pretty girl. So were several girls he knew. He had been attracted to her: nothing unique about that. A day with Debby Palmer, if he could coax her into beach-roving with him, would settle those factors into place. Then he could forget her, and enjoy the rest of his holiday in peace.

He picked his way down off the headland and rounded the cove; he crossed the beach and continued on towards the very green lawn unhurriedly, a young man who walked with his eyes open, very cool and very sure of himself.

A women—Debby's mother, he guessed—knelt at a border, busy with a trowel among vari-coloured snapdragon and delphinium. From behind the house, Max heard the chatter of a motor-mower. Mrs. Palmer returned his "Good morning" and rose. She had been pretty once, but the faint, bitter lines round her mouth had not yielded to make-up. Her eyes, like Debby's were grey. He gave his name and asked for Debby.

"Is she expecting you, Mr. Crowell?"

"I don't think so."

The mower, with its urban sound, moved round from the back lawn. The man who guided it was grey-haired, with a weathered mildness on his face. He was surprised, and the fact showed. Callers mightn't be frequent here. But he smiled, and his greeting was courteous.

Max said to them both, casually offhand, "Debby introduced me to juniper hunting yesterday. I'd planned another session of it, if she'd like to go."

"Juniperus scopulorum," Palmer said. "An interesting wood, rather rare on this coast... From what Debby told us, Mr. Crowell, we gathered you'd met last year. University man, aren't you?"

"That's right, sir." Something of an inspection was in order, naturally. "At least I was. I'm now working in Toronto. I'm on holiday."

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He had apparently passed muster. "Well, you don't want to waste your day chatting with us," Palmer said. "I'll just give Debby a call." His shoulders were stooped, but he was plainly younger than his old-man's walk.

The call wasn't needed. She was coming down the steps, in jeans and blue short-sleeved shirt, white socks and flatties. She looked, with the sun on her hair, like a slender schoolgirl. But she was all woman, Max thought, in the hearty male cliché his father would have used, his paw of a hand shaping curves.

Debby's face was pale, but she seemed composed and not too surprised. "Hullo, Max."

"Hi." His assurance had slipped a little, he realised. "I'm told the juniper grows taller, up along the coast. If you happen to be free . . ."

She nodded, accepting his presence and the invitation calmly. "Is there anything I can bring?"

"A bathing suit if you like."

"I've already had a swim." To Mrs. Palmer, Debby said lightly, "Be back to help with the dinner, Mother."

Max said to her parents with the right touch of polish on the apple, an indication of well-shined intentions, "I'll take good care of her."

"I'm quite sure you will, young man," Debby's father said too heartily, and turned back to his mower.

The grey man had departed a shade from the rules of the occasion. There was an intangible something about the way Palmer had looked at him—not questioning, but perhaps speculative. That gleam didn't usually appear in a parent's eye till there had been meetings enough to indicate fire behind the smoke. You got stuck if you were reckless; if you were a wary bird with a career to make in an underpaid profession, you sidled towards the exit.

THEY didn't speak, either of them, till they were round the cove. Debby said then, picking her way along the logs ahead of him, "You shouldn't have come. I wasn't being coy—I honestly didn't intend to see you again. Yesterday was a mistake, Max. My father saw us from the boat and I didn't appreciate being grilled about you."

"Why shouldn't he ask about me? It's a habit of fathers. If you ever meet mine, he'll size you up like a horsetrader." Max was doing some sizing-up himself, confirming yesterday's impressions. The enchanted climate had reclaimed him.

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"He'd say, 'You picked one, boy. She's classy.'"

"I don't propose to meet your father. I meant what I said yesterday."

"You agreed to be friends on your own terms. I accepted that. Still do."

"I also said good-bye."

"And I didn't accept that."

"Obviously. But after today, I'm afraid you'll have to."

"Huh-uh. I'm as stubborn as you are Debby. Perhaps more so."

"You'll have no choice," she told him, and he said to her amiably, "Hold up! You stepped right over it. *Juniperus scopulorum!*"

"Yellow cedar. You never learn, do you?"

But he peeled a shaving from the redhearted wood and lighted it, loosing the pungent fragrance. And his luck was in; it was juniper, sure enough.

"Where does that stuff come from?" he asked her. "What does it look like, Debby, growing?"

"I wouldn't know." She was in a strange mood, sardonic and indrawn. "I'm not convinced the tree exists. I think it's a fable like a lot of other things."

"Crazy talk. It exists. One day I'll show you."

"That," Debby said, "would be a miracle. I don't believe in miracles either."

"You seem not to believe in a great many things, my friend."

"I have no special reason to." She spoke very coldly. "Let's get on, shall we?"

"Of course. But I'll make a deal with you." He grinned down at her, keeping it light, working to lift her out of her mood. "The day I show you a juniper scopuwhatsit, alive and growing, you admit belief. You bow to a miracle, you give me your trust and your true affection."

"A deal," Debby said, and her mouth-smile mocked him. "But work fast, my large, thickheaded friend. You have only today."

They hardly talked at all after that, for several miles of desolate beach. Once Max offered to carry her across a big pool, but she slipped out of his reach. They plodded back towards her home cove with the sinking sun. Between them they trailed an eight-foot juniper trunk, a treasure that would keep the mild, sad man with the green lawns in lamp bases for weeks.

Max called a cigarette break at the last small rock hump between them and Debby's house. They settled in warm sand

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with their shoulders against a log and a hungry gull teetering close on pink feet.

"You see that island out yonder?" He fished scraps from their lunch bag for the gull, not looking at Debby, not wanting to look at her, very much aware of her, relaxed and quiet beside him—but somehow resentful, and obscurely irritated with her. "Does it have a name?"

"Of course. It's Juniper Island."

"Stop teasing." Her mood, through a long day's beach-combing had not softened. "I'll have a straight answer for a change."

"It's simply one of the Tantalus group. Perhaps it has a name—I don't know and I don't care." Her head turned, and her eyes, half closed, gazed through him and past. "If you were a poetry-reading type instead of a knothead, I'd tell you it was Avilion."

Max answered her loftily. "It just so happens English was one of my best subjects, Miss Palmer. I know all about your blessed Avilion 'where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow.' Tell me, as between experts, do you prefer Tennyson's treatment of Arthurian legend to Masefield's?"

"I decline comment. Try me on Dylan Thomas."

"Top marks for ignorance. I'll give you a sample from Masefield." It had been a rough day. He was tired. He said to the girl whose shoulder never quite touched his, "Here we have Lancelot to Guinevere, in a tower. He's a shade less knightly in Masefield, more human:

> Belovéd Queen, I am your lover,
> Body and bone,
> Spirit and all of me, past knowing,
> Most beautiful . . ."

A lie, a pretence; but at the moment, leaning on his elbow above her, he could almost believe it. Her lashes were long, darker than her hair. The planes of her face were very good, her mouth with its settled sadness lovely.

She said, eyes closed, with a bare stirring of her lips, "I prefer Tennyson. Stay knightly, my friend," Her calm face did not alter, but her words were brutal, swung at him like a club.

"I don't like being kissed. Or even touched. Try getting human, Max, and I'll smash your face with the first blunt object I can lay my hands on."

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Her words were violent, but behind them was the lost soul cry, the urgent, desperate appeal. He said quietly, "Debby," and the grey eyes opened. "What was it, Debby? A love affair that jumped the rails? What happened?"

"It was not a love affair." She spoke coolly. "Just to end this silliness, and since we're on the Romantics, I'm not Guinevere. But I'm no lily maid of Astolat either, so don't take this for blushing confusion . . . How far would you say that island is?"

He glanced seawards. "Eight miles." The words emerged stiff-lipped and sullen. "Perhaps nine. Why?"

"Wondering." She rose, dusting sand off her jeans. "I mean to swim to it. That's my holiday task. Care to join me?"

"No." He was a fair swimmer, but he had learnt something about these whiplash West Coast tides. He—and he suspected she too—would drown well short of mid-passage. He got up abruptly. "Stick to carbon monoxide," he told her, swinging a club of his own. "It's easier."

"Less sure though." She reached for a root of their twisted little tree trunk, voice steady, face calm. But the bones of the hand that gripped the root showed white through summer tan. "The Literary and Juniper-Hunting Society stands adjourned, Max. I never want to see you again."

They finished their happy, carefree day in taut silence. The juniper they dropped at the end of the lawn. Debby walked directly to the house and closed the door.

The climate of enchantment had betrayed him; he had behaved like a fool. An utter, incredible fool . . .

Palmer hailed him and Max waited, polite young man to the end. "Not staying for dinner?"

"Afraid not, sir."

"You'd have been welcome. Another day, perhaps. It's—I've no business talking to you like this on such brief acquaintance but we—my wife and I—were happy to see our daughter with a companion again. She spends too much time alone." He groped in his pocket for matches.

"At least," Palmer went on, "I can start you on your way. Or may I drive you?"

"Not necessary, thanks. I like walking."

Atop the point, Palmer stopped. About him was the air of a man with his mind made up. Max stood by him, the two of them facing seawards. It was a silence with no ease or comfort in it, and Max wished himself a mile away from this kind, defeated man. He'd taken a considerable beating on this idyllic day of a happy-go-lucky reporter's holiday. The picnic with Debby

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had not followed the course he had planned for it. Max waited, trapped and morose.

" We're quite sure you've helped her, just being with her." The pipe was cold again, but Palmer didn't reach for his matches. " She needs bringing out of herself."

Oh, of course! You've helped her. There were rockbound Calvinists in Max's family past; this inner voice was not entirely a stranger to him. *And that was your intention, my virtuous fellow, to draw Deborah Palmer out of herself? Liar! You used the good grey poets to make a pass at her. So let us not play the hypocrite about it.*

Palmer's voice took over. " These days perhaps, one's inclined to think of tragedy in terms of mass destruction. I suppose what happened to our little girl, with her life ahead of her, matters only to us who love her."

He blinked twice rapidly. He was working up to it, going to unburden himself—a good father, a nice man, and too soft-fibred to bear the weight of his own distress. His little girl had sterner stuff, tempered metal, along with her sugar and spice.

" As I said, I've no right to talk to you like this, Max. My excuse is that we're desperate with concern for her; and that you're the only friend she's allowed herself for months. And I'd judge from what Debby has told us of you, not an entirely new friend either."

The tired eyes blinked again. Palmer swallowed, and then spoke in a hurried, harried voice. " Even so, I tell you this only because you're sure to hear it, the way tongues wag. Debby was dragged into a car by a pack of hoodlums one night in April. She was the victim of a gang assault. They abandoned her, half dead, in a shack in the Fraser Valley. The men got ten years apiece and twenty lashes. I tell you, it wasn't enough. I'd have taken pleasure in killing them with my own hands. And slowly."

Max hardly felt the touch of Palmer's hand on his shoulder. There was only a spreading numbness, and the sense of a slow internal bleeding. April was the time of the flowering tree. April was Debby. He would hate April, for her sake, for evermore.

He moved a leisured half-pace away from the hand that could never have killed. *We are offering, today only, a cheap rate on one damaged daughter. This being an extraordinary situation, we bridge the period of trial. We absorb you on sight into the bosom of the family . . .*

He found a voice, and words, acting his part in a play that should never have been produced. " Give her time, Mr. Palmer."

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Weak words, and the voice seemed to come from somewhere outside him. " In time she'll get over it."

" And you'll—you'll keep on helping her ?"

" If I can. If Debby will let me."

He liked Palmer, he could spare pity for him ; but always, deep down, he would hold this man in contempt.

Max left him there, stoop-shouldered, standing with his pipe in his hand. The numbness still on him, Max made his way along the foreshore. The sensation persisted that his heart was quietly draining. Not till he was far past his uncle's cottage, and on the outskirts of the town, did he fight his way back to a state that allowed something like reasoned thought.

He shouldn't have let the thing hit him like that. She was not his girl, he was not in love with her, although for a time he had wanted Debby Palmer as he had wanted no girl before her in his life. He was a tough reporter. On the police beat, rape was a commonplace. No reason, none at all, why it should have hit him like that.

Sunset was past, but to the east, by a fluke of reflected light, their happy island rose golden from a sea of the true, the Homeric wine.

Max stood at the tidemark, watching the rich light fade.

The letter to his father still lay unposted on the table in the tent where his aunt had quartered him. He tore it up. There would be another to write, but at this point he wasn't at all sure how it would go. If Harry were here, if they could be hunched over a table somewhere, himself looking into that boiled red face with its toughness, its shrewdness, its horsetrader eyes, pale and hard as blue marbles, he might gain some hold on a situation that had skidded from under him like a pulled rug. But in this he was on his own.

He found single cause for hope. She had remembered him, and she needed him. That belief of his was no mere act of faith. It was a truth that had settled on him, that owed nothing to male vanity.

Still, his emotions remained in pretty much a mix-up, a muddle of hate for certain faceless brutes, anger salted with grief, pity laced with a curious sense of loss. Fear was there too. She'd tried once to kill herself, and he hadn't liked the way she'd talked of that island under the sea haze, arguing a plan that could well be another form of self-destruction. There had been something worse than daunting in the absolute finality of that brush-off. It had to be faced—this was no teacup tempest he had blundered into, and her good-bye might be for the world as well as for him.

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SOMETHING else had to be faced. For several hours he had been fighting against it, lying to himself. It was time he accepted the truth. A sliver of juniper smouldering in a girl's brown hand had torched into a forest fire. He was in love with Deborah Palmer, and this was no mere summer crush. It frightened him to realise how deeply and how bitterly he loved her. Odd thing. He had thought of love, the very few times he had paused to consider that tender emotion, as something warm and gentle and kind. He had never envisioned love as a hawk with whetted claws.

He was tired out, but the late night found him lying awake, his mood no less bleak. When he did doze, it seemed for seconds only.

The thing that brought him wide awake was metaphysical entirely. He found himself sitting up—cold, tense and listening. He felt as he had that other morning when a cry for help, wordless, soundless, had struck through to him.

A sense of dreadful urgency hurrying him, he scrambled into his shorts and ran barefoot through dew-soaked grass to the cottage. The telephone was in the kitchen, a goose-necked, archaic thing with a crank at its side. Max roused a drowsy night operator and got the Palmers' number. It was, by the kitchen clock, four-thirty. A lunatic business, this; they'd be deep asleep, Debby included. The ringing went on and on.

At the other end, the receiver was finally fumbled off the hook. Palmer's voice reached him in a vague mumble. Max wasted no time on explanations or apologies, simply asked him to check on Debby, make sure she was all right.

The wait seemed interminable. When Palmer came on again, he was no longer sleep-drugged but a man in a panic. "Max, her bed hasn't been slept in. She's gone. I found two letters, one for you . . . I'll check the garage. I'd better call the police at Cameron Bay."

"Take your boat," Max told him. "I'll head out from here. She's somewhere off Madrona Point in line with the first island you can see."

Another voice, a woman's, cut in on the party-line. "If you're talking about that Palmer girl, you're right. I saw her from my window up on the hill while I was getting my husband's breakfast. She waded in at first light."

The anonymous voice had confirmed his fear. He didn't pause to thank the woman, or to answer his aunt's sleepy question. He dashed out, hoping his cousins had left their boat fuelled.

The twelve-footer was fast; he opened up the engine and the

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boat climbed and began to plane, the beach receding down a flat wake. It was too early for haze. The island showed black, hard and tiny across a silver sea.

Standing braced and steering with his knee, Max ran north-east. The binoculars showed only drift afloat, flotsam licked off the beaches by last night's tide. If Debby was still swimming, if Debby was still alive, she'd be at least a mile out, possibly a good deal farther. The brawling tide that swept south and offshore would carry her fast.

But he had no reason, not the slightest, to believe the girl who wanted to die would still be alive out there.

His eyes caught movement, distant between rafts of drift, and he swung the glasses with hope flaring. But the sleek head was a seal's, and he kneed the wheel, setting the boat back into a quartering course.

Time to slow down. No use flying wildly in all directions. He throttled the engine, cruising south-east now on a cross-tide, outward slant, the island rising distant from the straits, a red sun creeping over it. Palmer was taking hell's own time to get his boat out. A commercial vessel, a salmon troller, was plodding up from the south. Otherwise the passage stretched empty.

She could be hanging on to a log. But hanging on had not been her intention.

Palmer appeared at last, his boat whipping from its cove and settling on a straight-out course. She wouldn't, she couldn't possibly, be on that bearing. The man was making no allowance for tide drift; he was going to be no use.

Max finished his sweep and steered the boat into another of those long diagonals. The sick fear and the hopelessness were deepening in him, but the glasses were steady at his eyes.

Sun-glare gilded the sea; his eyes began to ache as the dazzle strengthened. He rubbed a hand across his face, raised the binoculars again, and spotted movement dead ahead in a lane of smooth water between chopping tide rips. This time it was not a seal.

She was moving very slowly, nothing you could call swimming, afloat but no more, drifting on the tide. He dared not risk a hail, but put the boat, still at reduced speed, across her line of drift and then turned it into the current.

She was almost done. He tossed a lifebelt from fifteen feet, landing it close alongside her. Debby turned her head. He glimpsed the blank, blind face afloat for a moment longer. Then it was sinking, wavering down, blurring and fading, dissolving in the depths.

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Max stopped the engine dead and, with the boat still in its forward glide, went over from the middle thwart in a deep dive. He stroked still deeper, eyes open, pressure building against his eardrums. There would be no more than this one, desperate chance.

Something brushed his legs and he stroked again, and rolled, and the tide in a whim of mercy fetched her against him, pushing them up towards the surface. Max broke through, strangling and blowing, but with the inert body locked against him. He shifted his grip to get Debby's face out of the icy water.

His boat had gone south with the tide, moving fast, impossibly out of reach. Palmer was nowhere in sight; no help to be looked for from that source. Max trod water, wondering how long he could keep them afloat. He wasn't sure she was breathing. He could be adrift here with a dead girl's face between his hands.

Time was a lost dimension. He had been aware abstractedly of a thud like a slowed pulse, a languid beat that persisted in his ears. A near hail pierced his lethargy. With an effort he swung his head. The fishing boat was closing on them. It passed very slowly, exhaust spitting lazy vapour puffs. A yellow-haired man tossed a lifebelt. Max stroked twice and hooked it with his free arm.

The grey hull sidled close, turned and crept up on them. Max blinked into a broad, sunburnt Baltic face. Muscled arms reached down. A voice said, as calm as if it were asking him to pass the sugar, " Leave go, boy. I got her."

The big Swede worked the water out of her while his little blackhaired partner recovered the drifting boat. Max stood in the waist, a blanket from a bunk over his shoulders, his teeth chattering.

" She's alive? " The words were a croak.

" Ya, sure." The blond fisherman spared him a grin, while his hands kept to their rhythm . . . forward and down . . . back . . . forward again. " She breathes good now, real good. I t'ink we put her in blankets below, maybe get some rum into her." He pushed shaggy hair from his forehead. " You could use a shot too, mister, I bet."

Max picked Debby up and took her below. The Swede followed. A wet swimsuit was poor medicine for a half-frozen body. Max peeled her out of it and wrapped her in blankets in a bunk as narrow as a coffin, and then turned to address the broad back in the grey workshirt. " About time I thanked you. She'd had it."

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" I got stove lids heating," the fisherman told him placidly. " Rum's in the underneath locker. You yust help yourself."

He had asked no questions, but an answer was owed. " She thought she could swim to that island, the crazy little fool," Max said. They were words of shaken and aching love, but they came out harshly now. " It seems she was wrong."

He found the bottle and downed a four-finger tot, welcoming the fire the strong rum kindled in his belly. The lids of the galley stove, wrapped in a dish towel and an old shirt, he slid against Debby in her nest of blankets. Then he took himself above decks, warmer now, his teeth no longer chattering.

Palmer was tearing down on them. Max waved, leaning his haunches against the gunwale, slightly drunk and enjoying a beatific calm. On the point of ramming, Palmer slowed. Max took the boat's painter and helped the grey man aboard.

" She's all right," Max said.

" Praise God! I can't thank you and these men enough. I want to see her! "

Max stopped him with a hand against his chest. He smiled but his eyes and his voice were very hard. He said to Palmer, " No."

Presently the Swede poked head and shoulders out of the cabin. " She asks for someone. Keeps asking. Mac, maybe it is, some name like that." He grinned and said to Max, " I t'ink maybe you."

He went down to her and knelt by the bunk. Her eyes, too large for the pointed face, stared up at him.

" It's all right, Debby," he said to her. He reached for the rum bottle, slid an arm beneath her shoulders. " Here, just a sip."

She drank obediently, a hand free and clutching the rough grey blankets against her breast. Max settled her back in the bunk. Her eyes closed and he caught the soft release of breath, the sound too faint for a sigh. In seconds, he knew she was asleep. But he stayed, guarding her. For a while at least, Palmer wasn't going to get to her. The soft-cored blunderer might yet become his father-in-law one day, but if he tried to come down here now he'd be tossed out without ceremony.

On a single tot of rum he was well and truly drunk. These days he was taking his happiness as it came, finding it in scattered fragments like juniper washed up by the sea. She was alive; he was happy.

The Swede came below. Max wondered if Palmer had tried to pay him.

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"That island—". Max asked. "Has it got a name?"

"Ya. Singletree. You don't see from this far, but it has got one little tree on top. Close to, it shows."

"A juniper?"

"Yust a tree. Maybe a fir." The Swede bawled up to his partner. "You know what is on Singletree?"

"Rock and grass." The answer was a matching bellow. "No water."

"He asks what kind of tree."

"Yella cedar. I went up once for a look."

"It's a cedar tree," the Swede said. "Now I t'ink we both have ourselves a drink."

"Thanks." Another drink was exactly what he wanted. The rest of his life he'd have a special warm corner reserved in his affections for strawhaired Swedes.

THE word had reached his aunt and uncle—broadcast, he supposed, by the party-line grapevine that had helped him to find Debby. As dutiful relatives they had things to say to their nephew, but their words didn't register. He listened stolidly, keeping his temper, reminding himself: They mean well, they'll be part of her family too, some day.

He changed clothes, ate with an excellent appetite and then, although he could have borrowed a car, tramped along the main road till he came to a side road leading to the Palmers' house.

Palmer met him on the verandah. He started to speak, and his voice wobbled; it was Max, this time, who dropped a hand on the older man's shoulder. "May I see her, sir? That is, if she's awake."

"We've been hoping to heaven you'd come. My wife, she's not too strong, she's been hysterical." His voice failed him, but he recovered. "We never for a moment thought she'd try that again, Max. We had another little talk with Debby last night, tried to make her see that what had happened to her would make no difference to any good man's feelings."

Max moved past him, into the gracious house that was a fragment of upper suburbia dumped with its fine green lawns at the end of a lonely road.

She was small in her bed, her face bleached and haggard. She looked once at him, and her eyes squeezed tight. "Damn you. Oh, damn you, Max." The words were half a moan. She went on, "Leave me alone. Go away."

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The extra sense tuned to her trouble warned him that this was not a time for comforting. He drew up a chair and sat down, dour and too big for a girl's dainty room, hands clamped on his knees. "How do you feel?"

"How do you think? Like hell."

"You deserve to. Looks as if you didn't train quite long enough for your holiday task. What happened? Lose your nerve?"

"The tide was wrong. I really did think I could reach the island."

"Had you planned to swim back?"

"I didn't care about getting back. Watch me next time, my great big meddling hero."

"There won't be any next time." He spoke to her quietly and sternly. "You almost ended two lives out there. It was a childish caper, Debby." He leaned to her, the chair complaining under him. "Stop running away. You'll promise me not to try that again, or anything like it."

Her lips twisted. "Very well. Shall I promise on my honour?"

"I'll settle for that," he told her.

She was silent for so long that he thought she had drifted off to sleep. Then her voice reached him, listless and low. "I wrote you a note. If you haven't read it, I want it back."

The letter was in his pocket. Palmer had given it to him, but he had forgotten about it till now.

"You can't have it. I don't want it either. I'm not collecting suicide notes." He got up, took the crumpled envelope from his pocket and burnt it over the ashtray on her table.

"You wanted me to come after you, Debby?"

"No."

"You called me."

"I didn't. And I owe you nothing, Max, nothing. If you think— "

"I've stopped thinking. Try that yourself." Gruffly he said to her, "I'm leaving." He had a few days of holiday left, but he expanded the lie. "I'm flying back home tonight."

"Must you?" She spoke as if the words were dragged from her against her will.

"Not exactly. No."

He waited, and she said in a whisper he scarcely caught, putting the plea into words at last, "Then stay. Help me, Max. Help me."

The letter was ash now. He reduced it to powder, poking it

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with his finger. This was a small gain, but even the one uncertain step was better than nothing. "I'll help you." He spoke as he would do to a sick child. "I'm not going away."

She ought to be sleeping. The shadows were darker under her eyes.

"Anything I can get you?" He crossed to her, stooped to settle her covers. "A nice cold drink of water?"

Her mouth smiled. The icy water had stiffened his football knee so that he limped slightly. But it was a minor nuisance, a small price to pay for the mercy of a Providence that had also seen fit to give women an extra layer of flesh. They could stand cold water a lot better than most men. . .

Limping back along the road, he considered himself and his position with a wry detachment. *You're a very noble fellow, you great big meddling hero, you. Mister Fixit, the mender of torn souls, messing about with something you don't begin to understand. A real eager beaver with the word of comfort.* He carried two aches, knee and heart. *How can you help her? What can you do for a girl in hell?*

But there was another voice that wouldn't be stilled, that rose from some wellspring of deep delight to sing like the stars of the morning. *This is my love, my true love. Gulls weave her a virgin's halo; in my heart I hold her virgin. She walked in honour, she walked in pride; sunlight went with her, and happiness. She walks in honour. She will be happy again.*

But he was no poet. He was a newspaperman, a hard-boiled police reporter. He kicked a stone and his knee twinged, and he cursed aloud . . .

His uncle and aunt left him alone, but he knew they were distressed and displeased. He found Grace and Peter, his cousins, inclined to be cool with him; and the honey-blonde, when he paused by her on the beach next morning, was a degree or two cooler than the water had been the day before.

He called for Debby after lunch, and they set off down the beach again. She was pale still, and she looked peaked and ill. Because she seemed to like to hear him talk, he rambled on about his job and the boost to senior reporter he'd get in a year or so; he told her about races he had rowed, and about friends on newspapers and weird characters in the car firm where he had worked during summer holidays. Most of all he talked about his father. He built the picture, trying to make her see that unpolished diamond as he knew and loved him, and as he hoped she would one day know him.

While he laid out his life for her—the two of them sheltered

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between logs from a scudding south-easter, under a leaden sky—he whittled her a very fine dachshund from a juniper scrap. Her mouth smiled when he passed it to her, and she buttoned it into her shirt pocket. It occurred to him that he had never heard her laugh or seen her cry. If she'd do either or both, his hopes would ride higher.

Presently a chill rain swept in from the straits. They lit a fire and set about building a lean-to of driftwood, gathering planks from the inexhaustible storehouse of the beach. As he settled a board into place, his arm brushed Debby's breast. She lashed out at him, catching him hard across his mouth. She tumbled their lean-to with one violent push, and whirled and ran as she had that first morning, as if furies pursued her.

Max didn't follow. He stood by the smoking fire, tasting blood from a cut lip, and he was doing the calling now, in silence, with his heart: *Debby, come back. Oh, come back . . .*

She slowed, halted and for a moment stood entirely still between foreshore and misted flats, far enough away to be small in the grey loneliness. Then, as if she begrudged each step, she came back to him.

"I'm sorry, Max." She wouldn't look at him. She spoke to his feet.

"Forget it. I'm a clumsy oaf, always was. Let's go home. We could give your father a hand, help him sand that table he's making."

She pointed to his bad knee. "I did that, too. You've got a lot to thank me for, haven't you?"

The limp had stayed with him. He had tried to conceal it, but not well enough. "A lot," he said. "I'll tell you how much one day."

Rain had darkened her hair. Her face was wet, but only from rain. She was small and slender and sweetly rounded . . . he knew how sweetly. He had kept his approach platonic enough to satisfy even the whey-blooded philosopher, but he wanted that fair girl very badly. Her nearness was a delight and a torment, a melody in the blood.

"Next time you hit someone, don't tuck your thumb in. You could break it." He grinned down at her, the smoke and the fine rain blowing against his face. Her action had been pure reflex, and he could laugh it off; but the realisation of what he was up against chilled him as rain and wind could not. With the best will in the world, no doubt, her parents had made a bad mistake, burying Debby here as if she were something to be hidden, wishing on her an overdose of solitude. Like their

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" little talks " with her, it was an error that had very nearly proved lethal.

On Sunday he borrowed a car, arriving at Debby's house early. She didn't ask where he was taking her and, ten miles south at Cameron Bay, waited meekly in the car while he hunted up a bottle of rum. That fishing boat might stay in on Sundays, or it mightn't.

They found it finally at a wharf in the midst of a forest of masts. Larson and his partner lived on board; the fishermen received them as if they were friends of long standing. The dark little man, an Icelander, was something of a teaser, but Debby took his joking well—so well that her act was almost convincing. The thank you call developed into a kind of party, a boat-to-boat visiting, with more bottles opened and a continuing smörgasbord that ranged from pickled herring through steamed crabs and smoked spring salmon, to gamy cheese and the top tier of a young Lettish couple's wedding cake.

As they were taking their leave, Larson placed a folded-over paper bag in Debby's hands. His wide face was stolid as ever, his tone phlegmatic, but his blue eyes twinkled.

" What's this? " Debby asked him. She was, Max thought, prettier than he had seen her since the night he had drifted through a dance with her and kissed her under a flowering tree. She had exchanged jeans for slim-cut navy slacks and a long-sleeved blouse of heavy cream silk. Colour was in her face and her curls were tousled. The men had made something of a pet of her; she carried a pair of abalone shells, and round her neck she wore a chain carved from a single piece of wood. From her extreme dignity, Max guessed she was a little tipsy.

" Nothing much. Yust somet'ing you forgot last trip with us."

Debby blushed red as fire, and for an instant Max was sure a smile invaded her eyes. But she thanked Larson gravely and on the way to the car offered no comment.

" Fun? " Max asked her.

She nodded. " You needn't underline your moral, my friend. Those men are decent and kind. I know most men are. No doubt it's my drinks talking, but I rate you the best of them."

Hope flared and words escaped him, forced from him by that hope. " I love you, Debby, I want you to marry me."

Her grey eyes considered him, and the hope withered. Nothing had changed; nothing would ever change between them. She shook her head. " I'm not as drunk as that, Max. For your own sake, I'll spare you that."

He declined a dinner invitation from Mrs. Palmer and drove

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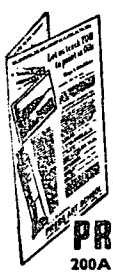

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back to the cottage. That letter to his father was overdue for writing. He was sweating at it, making heavy weather of it, when he heard the back door of the cottage slam and the solid tramp of feet.

Frowning, he looked up. The man who should have been smoking his after-dinner cigar in a Toronto dining-room loomed in the tent doorway, his beefy shoulders filling it. Harry Crowell seemed to radiate some remnant of the Eastern heatwave he had left behind. His sharp-cut summer suit looked slept in, his pearl-grey hat was shoved back from a damp forehead and the prominent blue eyes were bloodshot. Even in a pressurised cabin, plane travel had never agreed with Harry Crowell.

"O.K., kid." He crowded into the tent while Max still gaped. The legs of the camp bed bowed as his weight descended. "Let's have it. Brother Art hit me with a yard and a half of letter, sent express. Discounting for wind and a streak of self-righteousness, I gather from Arthur you've bitten off a pretty fair chunk. Where is she?"

"Well, for heaven's sake, am I supposed to lead her out on a leash?" Max stared at his father, feeling the good, remembered warmth, the grin wreathing towards his ears. They'd always been close, their life together a hard-mouthed, muleheaded give-and-take. "Stick around, Harry. You'll meet her. But not looking as if you've crawled out of a ditch, or with any cheap cigar in your face. This one's a lady."

"Fussy type, huh?"

"Very." He sobered then. "Look, play this one cagey. Keep a chain on your big mouth, don't touch her, and don't try to kiss the bride in advance. Whatever Uncle Arthur may have told you, we're a long way from that."

"Arthur has it in his head she's a flighty piece."

"He's a liar!" He could feel his face whitening in shocked anger. "Let him tell me that!"

"He won't. I've had a chat with Arthur, killing time while you were off with your girl. You keep your temper and use your head. Marry her and she's family. If she's on the up-and-up, Brother Arthur will come round."

"Of course. But he's still a liar. They have a spare camp bed at the house. I could bring it down here for you."

"Wha'd'you think I am, Daniel Boone? I like a roof over my head." Harry Crowell climbed ponderously to his feet. "I have cars to sell that nobody wants to buy," he grumbled. "No time to waste hanging around here. You fix it for me to meet her tomorrow."

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They had dinner with the Palmers, the strain still there, but Harry Crowell easing it, working—how hard, only Max appreciated—at not being a roughneck. Debby wore a plain green dress with a gold clip at her throat. Her cap of curls shone in the light. She watched them, speaking hardly at all, a slender girl with a still-faced loveliness that set the knife working once more in Max's heart.

Palmer offered to drive them back to the cottage, but Harry Crowell confounded his son by refusing. "We walked here, we'll hoof it back," he said. "I don't get nearly enough walking. In my business, you see, it's almost an eighth mortal sin to walk."

The moon had shrunk to a gnawed rind; the stars were very bright. They tramped in silence for a long time.

"You know what she thinks of you?" Harry Crowell demanded at last.

"Yes. I'm poison. Nothing personal in it, of course. Apart from being a male, I'm a hell of a good egg." The sight at dinner of Debby in the green dress—in girl's clothes—had hit Max hard. He spoke in frustration and bitterness. "Debby, with reason, happens to hate men . . ."

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"She thinks you're God's first cousin. It sticks out all over her. You move ten feet from Debby and she's scared, she's lost, she wants you back."

"Well, I'd sooner not be God's cousin—just her husband. And I won't bet on ever being that."

"You'd better not fluke it. She's classy. You come home with her, see, or not at all. She can cook. That new housekeeper can't; she's been murdering me by inches . . . Lord, boy, it will be nice to have a proper woman in that old barn of ours again! It's been a long time."

Max felt his throat tighten. This was the stamp of approval. The horsetrader had gone all the way overboard for Debby.

"Need any money?"

"I could do with some. I'm about broke."

"You newspaper monkeys always are. I have a couple of hundred loose. There'll be plane fares waiting at Trans-Canada. I wish I could be around for the wedding. I'd liven it up, I tell you."

"I wish I could be around then, too," Max muttered.

"Stop crying in your beer," Harry Crowell told him. "It's a problem, but it's yours, and I can't help you with it. All I know is, you picked me a real nice daughter."

His cigar butt glowed to a last pull; he dropped it and mashed it without breaking his lumbering stride. When next he spoke, it was a startling, violent explosion. "They hurt her badly, those crooks! They should have hung for it!" Harry Crowell pounded his fist into his palm. There was no empty talk of killing slowly with his own hands, but he wept unaffectedly now, a man who lived hard and drank hard and, in a matter of minutes, had taken Debby for one of his own.

He tugged the handkerchief from his breast pocket and blew his nose with a harsh honking. "Lose her," he said, "and you're even dumber than I thought. If money could fix it, I'd go over my ears in debt for you two. That you know. But this is out of my league, boy. This you play out by yourself."

But if Debby thought him any kin to the Deity, it failed to show. For most of that week she gave him steady hell, while the days wove their familiar pattern of sun and wild beaches, sea and heat-rimmed sky. His limp got no better; liniment didn't ease it. Debby walked him hard, and he knew she was out to hurt him, deliberately bearing down on a revealed weakness. He took it stoically, but for hours at a stretch he was sure that he hated her.

On Thursday, he phoned his city editor and, after a somewhat

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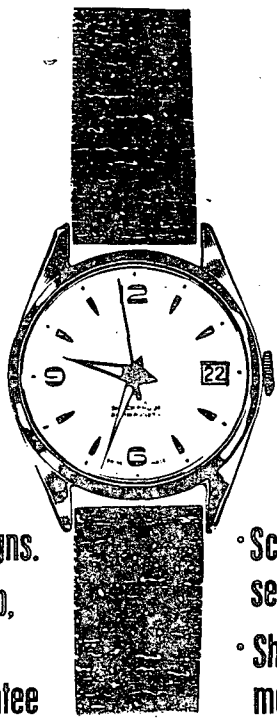

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profane tussle, got himself an additional week off, without pay.

Friday was worse. On Friday, Debby struck off along the beach and he couldn't keep up with her. He lagged behind, his knee throbbing, threatening to buckle under him. Finally in mid-stride, it betrayed him, and he dropped in wet sand and sat there, fumbling for cigarettes, his hands unsteady.

There was no kindness in that girl, not a grain. She was a habitation for demons. More than that, she was enjoying her tawdry tragedy, stringing it out. Let her come within range and he'd clout her with a rock, if there were rocks here instead of wet sand, and if he were not sprawled in it like the world's prize chump . . .

She came back slowly, as if dragged by an invisible cord. She stood over him, slim in laundered jeans and blue shirt, the breeze in her curls. "Do you still want to marry me, Max?"

There were no rocks. He nodded dumbly.

"You know what you'd be getting."

"What I want, Debby." It could be, probably was, a new form of kicking him, now that she'd had her way with his knee.

"You deserve better." She spoke softly, looking down at him. "You can't help me; I was wrong to ask you. If I knew how, I'd hurt you so badly you'd be glad to forget me. Do you want a ghost, Max? A zombi?"

"I want you."

She reached her hand to him, helping him up. Her face was unreadable. "Very well. I'll marry you."

He stared at her in disbelief. "Do you mean that?"

"Yes. And if there were a God, I'd pray to be forgiven."

He bent to her lifted face, his hand as light on her back as if they were dancing. Her eyes were wide and blank and blind. Her lips were soft with the gentle coolness of rain in a parched summer, but they did not respond to his kiss. Everything had changed, and nothing.

"You didn't want that, Debby." He spoke gently, deep in trouble, still not quite able to believe. They had been building up towards something—some obscure crisis in their bleak sharing of loneliness—and perhaps they were into it, facing it now.

"You know what I wanted, Max. You wouldn't allow me that."

"And marrying me is next best. Almost as good as drowning." She said thoughtfully, as if he hadn't spoken, "I believe we have to wait three days. We'd better drive down to Cameron Bay this afternoon for our licence."

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THEY were married the following Tuesday in Cameron Bay United Church; Debby's parents were there, and Max's aunt and uncle, with a cousin for his best man and another for Debby's bridesmaid. Debby's parents would have preferred a civil ceremony as less likely to draw attention, but the girl had surprised Max, insisting on a church wedding, and he had backed her up. He had forced one concession himself from Debby. She carried flowers and she wore white.

Her mother wept, and the cousins engaged in a dispirited throwing of rice. They were glad, all the jolly party, to do without a reception.

A couple of hours later, from Palmer's sixteen-foot boat, Max watched the low white house at the head of the cove dwindle down their wake.

Debby sat forward at the wheel, in jeans and white shirt. She looked like a bad-tempered schoolgirl and she said to Max, standing behind her, " Nice. It lacked only the shotgun."

" It's the last wedding you're going to have," he told her, " so remember it kindly." He leaned his forearms on the seat back, staring moodily over her head. " There's your island, Debby. This time you get there the easy way. Do you think you'll like it? "

" I think we made a mistake picking it. It's just another barren island. Nothing special about it."

" It has a tree," Max said. " That's special. Two trees or no trees would spoil it." He cupped his hands to shield a match, lighted two cigarettes and passed one over Debby's shoulder. It was strange to see his ring on the hand that accepted it. " I got hold of two sleeping-bags. Eiderdowns. You'd better peel the liner out of yours or it'll roast you this weather."

She looked up, studying his face while her hands held the boat on course. He expected something cutting, the sneer that could still wound and diminish him. But she said with no hint of mockery, " Thank you, Max."

Singletree was farther away than they had thought. Dusk was on the island when they drew close, slipping into a bottle-necked cove, a natural haven.

They landed their camping gear. Max watched his wife as she unpacked, graceful, slender, her brown hands sure.

No tent was needed in this dry August. They rigged a tarpaulin on poles, lacing it with fishline, making a slanted roof to shed the morning dew. Max laid a fire. They had brought a steak from Cameron Bay for their wedding supper.

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"A good island," Max said, when they crouched shoulder to shoulder at their cooking. "Peaceful."

"An island," Debby said. "There won't be any fresh water, so go easy with that can." He had whittled a driftwood spatula for her which she held in her ring hand. The bones showed white through tan. "We'll have to cross to Nasatcha Cannery or somewhere tomorrow."

They ate and tidied up. "Want to go exploring?" Max asked.

"You go. I'd like to finish squaring camp."

He wandered off up the grassy slope. He loved her and they were married, although he didn't feel married and he was lonelier than he had ever been in his life. He wondered what thoughts Debby entertained down there, where the flames cast a wavering reflection across water turned ebony with the coming on of dark. The slope steepened. He limped on towards the crest, seeing the first star through the straggly branches of the warped tree that crowned their island.

He stayed there for the space of a cigarette, then jogged back down the slope. The fire burnt brightly, but he couldn't see Debby. Panic clutched him and he ran, the long grass brushing past his ankles, the limp forgotten.

She knelt inside the lean-to. She had blown up the air mattresses with the pump and ranged them side by side, and was toiling in a muddle of opened sleeping-bags.

"Help me, Max." Her voice was strange—taut and shaking. She looked at him over her shoulder, and she was crying, the tears spilling down her face. "These things are supposed to hook together for a double bed. The damned zipper stuck."

He knelt by her, pushing her hand away. "Don't," he told her. "Please don't, Debby."

"I will! I'm your wife, Max." The tears still streamed in a quiet weeping. "I want to be your wife. I'd be lost without you. I'd dry up and blow away. I mean to be your wife."

"Even if it kills you?" The bitter words slipped out, and he would have given anything to recall them.

Debby's face was in her hands, the slight shoulders shaking. Her voice came muffled through an agony of sobs. "I don't need to be killed. I've been dead and in hell for months. I believed in God and He let it happen; but He wasn't merciful. He wouldn't let them kill my body. I love you, Max. I saw you once and never forgot you. I love you and I'm no good to you—I'm smashed and dirty. Even the sea couldn't wash me. Max, Max, what have I done to you?"

He knelt by her and he shared that agony, knowing his own face

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was wet. An answer was required of him and it must be the right answer, or her life and his, their joined lives, could be blasted past mending.

He reached for her hand and brought her up with him. She had changed to white pyjamas and she looked soft and young and small in them, less woman than child. "There's something I want you to see, Debby. Now—tonight."

He led her up the slope, barefoot through the rough grass, her hand in his. The stars had multiplied; the warped little tree on the island summit wore stars in its twisted branches. He led her under its shadow and halted. His knife was not needed. He snapped a dry twig, struck a match and set the twig alight. It burnt like a small taper, the flame unstirring in windless calm, the pungent incense rising between them.

The flame dwindled, the red coal faded, the fragrance died away.

"You told me you'd believe, Debby."

He waited, thinking: She must be cold; I should have brought her jacket. He had nothing left of himself, no more to give. But there had to be an answer, and it must be right.

He was no miracle-worker, he had no answer—only from the depths of his distress a desperate reaching. "I'm lost too, Debby. Help me."

They stood in the core of the night, in velvet shadow. He heard a small, an inconsequential sound, the dry twig breaking in Debby's fingers.

"It's strange, Max." Her voice was entirely calm, the words casual, as if the storm below had been something suffered in a dream. "All these summers I never found a live juniper. Never the living tree."

Max knew she was smiling; he wished he could see her eyes. She turned against him and her face lifted, and this time her mouth responded to his kiss. They shared recovered April, under a tree that bore stars for flowers.

He took Debby's hand and they started down together to their camp. At the lean-to, he tucked her into her sleeping-bag helping her as if she were a child. The dog he had carved for her dropped from her pocket; he recovered it and her fingers closed over it. He built up the fire for comfort and then returned to sit by her, hunched over his knees.

"A good island," he said.

"The best," she told him. "when we're rich we'll buy it. Although we could probably have it for nothing. No one but us would want it."

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He said, " You know, there might even be water. We could rig some sort of catch basin, at least."

Her hand groped, found his and lay in it, relaxed and life-warm. " I wish now," she said, " you hadn't burnt my note. It—said things I find hard to speak, Max. That I loved you dearly and truly. That you were everything I ever wanted. Everything straight and kind and good. I'd lost all that. Or believed I'd lost it. I was wrong. You've given my life back to me. I'm I'm clean, I'm free."

He told her, " You were always clean, Debby."

Her low voice went on in a drowsy murmuring. " I did call to you from the water. I know you heard me."

The juniper should carry their initials, twined in a heart. But that was childish stuff; they wouldn't mar the little gale-battered evergreen, the miracle tree with stars in its crown. No heart was needed.

" Have you ever been dreadfully ill, Max? Close to dying? Then one day, for the first time, known you were getting well? I feel like that. You gave me my miracle. Not just tonight, not any one day. Give me time now, only a little time."

He had seen her weep and shared her tears. He heard her laugh, suddenly and softly, and his heart shared her laughter.

" I'll be the best wife you'll ever have, my darling."

" The only one I'll ever have," he told her. " Or ever want."

Their miracle had been no sudden thing—he too realised that. A tear-storm and a star-bearing tree had only brought it to completion. He settled beside her. Debby's head found his shoulder and they rested so, his arm around her. He could feel her quiet breathing, her temple was warm under his lips. Presently he knew she was asleep, but he did not move from her. The edge of the lean-to roof cut sharp across the Milky Way, a tidestream of stars. Max smiled in the dark, his love beside him, the pain deep-drowned in fathomless happiness.

God sent them a last small token. The fire glowed to the breath of the newborn night wind. Faint in the smoke was a pungent incense, a fragrance of juniper.

SOLUTION TO TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD (PAGE 167)

ACROSS. 1, Titanic. 7, Animal. 8, Disowns. 9, Insane. 10, Baboon. 11, Oracle. 13, Anoint. 16, Invent. 18, Cavort. 20, Ignited. 21, Bodega. 22, Needles.

DOWN. 1, Tide. 2, Tosca. 3, New moon. 4, Casino. 5, Fiesta 6, Gauntlet. 10, Bungalow. 12, Revenge. 14, Ironed. 15, Titian. 17, Natal. 19, Ides.

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Leisure-Pleasure

To quicken the cold dark tempo of winter, some suggestions that are both stimulating—and pleasurable

IN the days before central heating, double windows and car heaters, our forebears used hot drinks liberally in the winter months to keep themselves warm. Then, the basic constituents were rum, gin, brandy and whisky, to which vodka can now be added. But wine was, and still is, the foundation of many winter warmers.

One of the easiest to make is a **Hot Buttered Rum.** All that is required is a gill of rum, brown or white; two teaspoons of brown sugar; and a walnut of butter. Puddle the butter and sugar in a little boiling water in a tall glass, add the rum, and fill up with boiling water. An egg-spoon of mixed spices is a good addition.

A simple hot drink can be made with vodka—stirring into a mug one measure of the spirit; one teaspoon of soft sugar; the same quantity of lemon juice, filling up with boiling water and adding a twist of lemon peel.

The traditional **Rum Punch**—quantities are for six persons—requires one bottle of red wine; half a bottle of Jamaica rum; a glass of brandy; and the juice and rind of a lemon. Put these ingredients in a large saucepan, heating slowly and adding sugar to taste. It should be strained and served very hot over slices of lemon.

Berry Brothers and Rudd, the wine merchants, have a recipe for **Cambridge Milk Punch.** Try putting the rind of half a lemon into one pint of milk with twelve lumps of sugar. Boil slowly for 15 minutes, remove from the fire, take out the lemon rind. Mix in the yolk of one egg which has been blended with a tablespoon of cold milk, two of brandy, and four of rum. Whisk it all together and serve when frothed. This is not particularly strong—but suitable for the younger people. The quantities of the spirit can be increased for their elders.

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Mulled Wine is a good winter drink, easy and inexpensive to make. Take a bottle of Spanish or Algerian burgundy; half a bottle of an orange or lemon fruit cordial; sugar, lemon peel, cloves and cinnamon to taste. Heat the mixture, but do not allow it to boil, and strain before serving. Sliced fruits and cherries floated on the top are a pleasant elaboration but not a necessity. This will be enough for four people.

Port Wine Negus has been a firm favourite for many years. Take a bottle of South African or Australian port-type tawny wine, add a small glass of lemon juice, filling up with hot water and using sugar to taste. The quantities can of course be halved.

New to this country is the 101 Jamaican " white " rum which costs 63s. per bottle because of its very high strength. It can be used to make hot or cold punches, but only a quarter of the usual measure of spirit is required.

Whisky does not really lend itself to mixing with other ingredients to make a hot drink, but it does make an admirable nightcap with sugar and hot water. If you are wet or chilled, there are few better ways of warding off the flu than a glass of hot milk with a double measure of Jamaica rum, two lumps of sugar, and a sprinkling of nutmeg. And so to bed, but not to the wheel of a motor car, for the contrast of hot alcoholic drinks and cold night air can produce surprising results! J.B.W.

BOOKSHELF THIS MONTH :

So our Little Tramp has written a book—**My Autobiography.** And because he has been an inveterate do-it-yourselfer since birth, not a word of it was ghosted.

Naturally you will want to read it, and though some parts are surprisingly heavy going, the long beginning is unforgettable. In these chapters with dignity, and complete lack of self-pity, Charles Chaplin tells of the squalor and ugliness of extreme poverty into which he was born. How his drink-sodden actor-father deserted his young wife and family and of the gallant fight made by this small courageous woman, once a pretty soubrette, to earn enough to keep them. How she lost her voice, and with it her only means of making money until, worn out with the heart-and-mind-breaking struggle, she became intermittently insane, spending her days in and out of the local asylum.

It was during one of these times that the small boy Charles was sent to his father to be looked after. The woman he was then living with was a virago who, in a drunken fit of rage, turned the child out into the night. Hungry, bereft, he sat on the door-step until morning.

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Then it was the workhouse.

Perhaps it was this sort of memory that an adult Charles, hugely successful in Hollywood, was to transmit into the bitter-sweet early films such as *The Kid*, with their unique quality of making us furtively blow our noses one moment and belly-laugh the next.

There are certain inherent disadvantages in writing of oneself, and undoubtedly Chaplin gives an impression of a man over in love with money. Yet writing of him, an American journalist gives quite a different picture. He tells how his newspaper wanted to find the actress-heroine of a very early film. Chaplin was approached but said casually he had no idea what had become of her. When she was finally traced to a small but comfortable home she took it for granted the reporter had come from Charles himself, saying with obvious surprise when she was told he hadn't her address, "Well I don't understand that, seeing I've had a cheque from him regularly every month since I stopped getting work." Just one of his private, imaginative generosities.

Inevitably the McCarthy witch-hunt, which ended with the star an exile from America, the country he had made so very much his own, left deep and bitter scars. But now he lives contentedly enough in Switzerland with his attractive, intelligent wife Oona, Eugene O'Neill's daughter, and their formidably large quota of sons and daughters.

Few people have brought us such a handsome gift of laughter and it is pleasing to find that it was a *young* audience who queued so enthusiastically for *The Gold Rush* when it was recently reissued.

H. V. Morton's **A Traveller in Italy** is a delightful book, full of sun and warm colours, well-informed without being schoolish, and the greatest fun to read whether you are a constant visitor to that lovely country, or just an armchair traveller. It makes a perfect companion volume to this globe-trotting author's book about Rome.

P.S. Don't be put off by the dust-jacket which is banal and chocolate-boxy!

Everybody has heard of **Max**—Max Beerbohm, but coming down to brass tacks, what exactly does one *know* about him? What did he *do*? There were some clever cartoons, of course, especially that of an elderly, tight-lipped Victoria sitting glowering at her forty-year-old-or-thereabouts son, the Heir Apparent to the throne, who stands in a corner meekly face to the wall; there was a charming soufflé of a book called *The Happy Hypocrite*,

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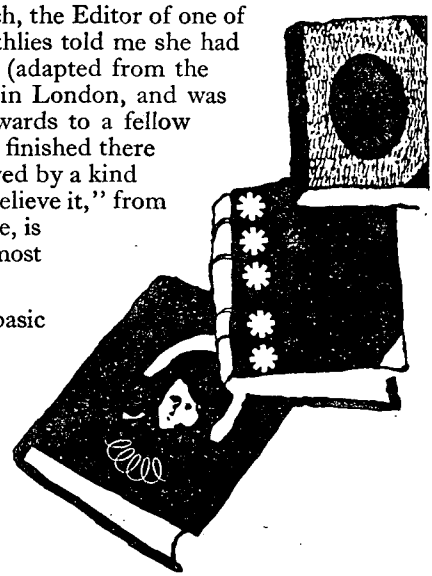
which Clemence Dane dramatised for Ivor Novello, who wanted to play Lord George Hell, and in which an unknown, enchanting wisp of a girl first made her name—Vivien Leigh. There were some slim volumes of elegant essays and his *Zuleika Dobson*, which made quite a stir at the time but which I would defy anyone today to read without heavy skipping. There was a stint on a highbrow weekly, *Saturday Review*, and some early broadcasts. All one would have thought providing little enough material around which to build a biography some 500 pages long. Nonetheless this is what David Cecil has succeeded in doing, and very easy, amusing reading it makes too.

Max died in 1956 in Italy, which he dearly loved and where he had made his home for 45 years. He is buried in St. Paul's. This book of David Cecil's, who seems to have understood him so well, brings him very much to life again.

For Better Brains there is Iris Murdoch's **The Italian Girl.** This sinister and improbable tale is impossible to describe in a small space, but it involves us with a typical Murdoch family, all of whom are odd, and all of whom revolve one way or another, round an even odder brother and sister who come visiting. Sufficient to say that if you enjoy this author then this is for you —if not, no!

Talking of Iris Murdoch, the Editor of one of our most successful monthlies told me she had been to *A Severed Head* (adapted from the novel) running as a play in London, and was describing the plot afterwards to a fellow dinner-guest. When she finished there was a short silence, followed by a kind but very firm, "I don't believe it," from her audience. This, to me, is reasonable comment on most of Miss Murdoch's work.



An author looking for a basic plot about cold-blooded murder will find just what he needs in the bible story of King David, Uriah the Hittite, and his seductive wife, Bath-Sheba. This is just what leading Israeli writer, Moshe Shamir,

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has done in his new book, **David's Stranger.** Bath-Sheba was very beautiful to look upon and King David, you will remember, not only looked but lusted so greatly that he arranged for the murder of her husband. " Set him," he instructed the commander of his armed forces, " in the foremost of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him that he be smitten and die."

The bewildered Uriah, who has fought by David's side in the winning of his kingdom, tells the story as he himself sees it happening. Incredulous that such a leader should betray him, still hopelessly loving a wife who despises him, he searches desperately for a meaning to life and the destruction and death now closing in on him.

This is the first of Moshe Shamir's novels to be translated for this country—and here, undoubtedly, is talent. A gloomy enough chapter of history impressively reconstructed and engrossing to read, but unlightened, alas, by even a glint of humour.

Why is it do you suppose that so many novelists, writing of long-dead famous characters (or infamous if you prefer) choose to do so in the first person? Robert Graves and his *I, Claudius* and Thornton Wilder's *The Ides of March.* And now this month besides Uriah and King David, comes Gore Vidal's **Julian.**

Except for some cross-talk between two rather endearing old philosophers, Julian tells his own story of his boyhood lived in the dangerous shadow of very probable assassination with a perfectly horrible brother as his only young companion; of his conversion to the cult of Mithras until his death when he was only 32.

This book is having enormous success in America, but I found it rather over-long despite the highly coloured setting of Byzantine splendour and contrasted against a background of most barbarous murders, eunuchs, orgies, some extraordinary love-making and other such excitements of the day.

Perhaps required reading, most of us only remembering the ruler summed up in:

Julian the Apostate
Had Christianity and lost it.
He made as his excuse
The worship of Zeus.

The month's batch of paperbacks include **The Venetian Blind**, an early William Haggard, that suave writer of adult thrillers. This one has been out of print for some years.

There are two more Gideons by J. J. Marric (who as you probably know is none other than John Creasey, thinly disguised),

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Gideon's Month and **Gideon's Staff**, both sound, satisfying novels with authentic Scotland Yard backgrounds.

From Mickey Spillane comes **The Girl Hunters**, to tie up with the release of the film in which Mr. Spillane appears in person as that unpleasant toughie, Mike Hammer.

Science fiction is well represented by John Lymington's **The Sleep Eaters,** which has a perfectly splendid bookjacket.

Anyone would be proud to give houseroom on their permanent bookshelf to the newly issued **Illustrated English Social History,** by that great scholar, G. M. Trevelyan. In four volumes, sold separately or together, this is a superb " history of a people with the politics left out, describing their food, their homes, their clothes, their customs, their beliefs, their pastimes " from the early Middle Ages through to Victorian days. A perfect buy for a Christmas book token.

If you enjoyed that terrific shocker *Psycho*, then the new Robert Block, **Terror,** is for you. In the same genre, **Murder is for Keeps** by Peter Chambers.

Nina Epton's trilogy on **Love** is published as a set, each with its own delightful sophisticated jacket specially designed by the French (obviously!) artist, André François.

Miss Epton's approach to her fascinating subject is erudite and sympathetic. J.D.

BOOKS REVIEWED:

Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (Bodley Head, 42s.)
H. V. Morton, *A Traveller in Italy* (Methuen, 36s.)
David Cecil, *Max* (Constable, 50s.)
Iris Murdoch, *The Italian Girl* (Chatto & Windus, 21s.)
Moshe Shamir, *David's Stranger* (Abelard-Schuman, 18s.)
Gore Vidal, *Julian* (Heinemann, 25s.)
William Haggard, *The Venetian Blind* (Penguin, 3s. 6d.)
J. J. Marric, *Gideon's Month, Gideon's Staff* (Hodder, 3s. 6d.)
Mickey Spillane, *The Girl Hunters* (Corgi, 2s. 6d.)
John Lymington, *The Sleep Eaters* (Corgi, 3s. 6d.)
G. M. Trevelyan, *Illustrated English Social History* (Penguin, 8s. 6d. each Vol.; 34s. the set)
Robert Block, *Terror* (Corgi, 2s. 6d.)
Peter Chambers, *Murder is for Keeps* (Corgi, 2s. 6d.)
Nina Epton, *Love* (Penguin, 5s. each Vol.; 15s. set)

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OUR MAN IN MOTORS WRITES:

Quiet and gentle in traffic, the latest M.G.B. only reveals the tough side of its character when it reaches a rare piece of open road. It sits firmly round the corners and is well able to build up to high speeds briskly.

The M.G.B. is the most powerful M.B. for a number of years. Designed and built at Abingdon, using the B.M.C. 1.8 litre B-series engine, it is now fitted with a five-bearing crankshaft for smoother and, in line with current thought, longer life. This car is excellent value for money.

As is usual with this type of car, it provides plenty of comfort for two with reasonable luggage space if you count the area behind the seats which is only partly taken up by the hood. At first, the gear lever seems set too high, but usage confirms it is in a convenient position.

The instruments are clean and controls within easy reach. The seats have plenty of fore and aft adjustment, but none for rake or height. On the passenger side there is room enough to wear stilts!

The test car had leather upholstery. One tends to forget the sheer joy of sliding into a well-shaped and well-worn leather seat. It is difficult to say exactly what it is—the scent, the feel—I really don't know; but plastic still has a long, long way to go before it catches up.

The cockpit has an air of solidarity, quickly backed up by the very rigid and tough body. Even on the roughest of roads there was virtually no scuttle shake, and certainly no rattles or squeaks developed.

One thoughtful idea on the car is a rubber corner to the top of the quarter lights—no doubt the work of a development engineer who had cracked his head open on some sharp door top!

The seating seems very low to begin with and the steering heavy. This gets much lighter at speed but requires rather a lot of effort parking or manœuvring in confined space.

Performance and handling are good. From 0 to 50 m.p.h. in 8.5 seconds is not slow, and with a top speed of 108 m.p.h. the M.G.B. is certainly no sluggard. On the road, the car is comfortable, with a flat, even ride going round corners, very much as if it is on rails, with little or no body roll. Even on wet and greasy roads, the behaviour is very predictable, and any breakaway is easily corrected. Brakes are well up to standard, though heating and cooling is not. In London traffic, the passenger became quite uncomfortable with the floor getting hot from the silencer just below.

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The hood looks neat, blends nicely with the body lines and is completely weatherproof. Though not child's play to erect or stow, it is now much easier than it was on earlier M.G.Bs. Wind-up windows and swivelling quarter-lights complete the civilised weather protection.

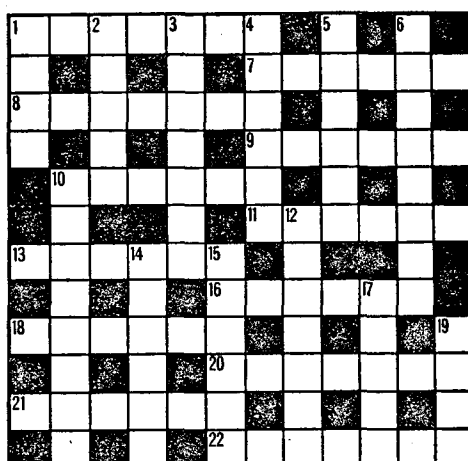
Not a competition car, the M.G.B. has more than enough performance.

Roadholding and braking coupled with an excellent gear box are enough to keep any spoilt driver completely happy, restful or exhilarated as the mood takes him . . . all for £834. K.F.

TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Ill-fated steamer (7).
7 Beast (6).
8 Disclaims (7).
9 Senseless (6).
10 Dog-faced monkey (6).
11 Hear it at Delphi? (6).
13 Consecrate with oil (6).
16 Fabricate (6).
18 Prance (6).
20 Editing (anag.) (7).
21 Wine-shop (6).
22 Pointed rocks? (7).



DOWN

1 Waits for no man (4).
2 Puccini work (5).
3 Barely a crescent (3, 4).
4 Public dancing-room (6).
5 Holiday (6).
6 Fits like a glove! (8).
10 Low dwelling (8).
12 An eye for an eye (7).
14 Pressed (6).
15 Artist's red (6).
17 From birth (5).
19 15th of March, for instance (4).

(Solution on page 159)

SOLUTION TO THE PUZZLE ON PAGE 50

13. The 7d. which he had over + the 6d. he borrowed was sufficient to give each boy a penny. Therefore there were 13 boys.

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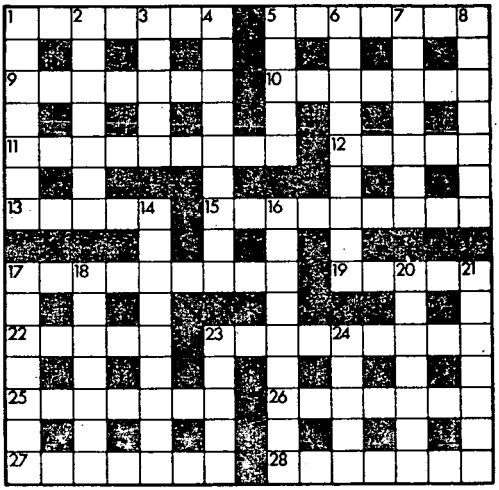
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 Novelist's favourite ejaculation? (7).

5 "Lay on, ——," (*Macbeth*) (7).

9 Honest, since engineer joined in (7).

10 St. David's Day dainty? (7).

11 Just the place to go all out for a duck (9).

12 Peers make merry (5).

13 Welsh border river—in the middle of elephant's teeth? (5).

15 Tried to lure inside (9).

17 Would he appreciate a present of tennis balls? (9).

19 All wet, so raggy artist quits (5).

22 Active—in domestic animal (5).

23 Protective links (9).

25 I do melt in this kind of dancing (3-4).

26 Prank—with a tough turkey? (3-4).

27 South American bird of golden years (7).

28 Sum reserved—strictly for the birds! (4-3).

DOWN

1 Melody—to harp on (7).

2 "The —— burn their sockets" (A. E. Housman) (7).

3 Contradictory odds (5).

4 Take a risk—embezzle a shilling more (9).

5 Take a husband, forsooth! (5).

6 The first day I get a partridge! (9).

7 Sunburnt? Not completely (7).

8 Plump nut—not hard to crack (7).

14 Sounds a violent winter sport! (9).

16 Pitch apostle in canvas sheet (9).

17 Tommy's got some colour (7).

18 Rebuked—for hiding twopence in a niche (7).

20 A gruel nearly made of small grain? (7).

21 Traditionally fired on Christmas Eve? (4-3).

23 Applaud the crazy Frenchwoman (5).

24 Abyssinian ruler in the drink! (5).

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